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William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

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The Compleat Panther Cycles

William F. DeVault

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William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

In the Words of a Crimson Beast

Editor's Note: After the affair of the original Panther had pretty much run its course, the next lover in the poet's sphere was a remarkable young woman who took the totem of Brigit, the Celtic Goddess of Fire and Poetry. This titian-haired Amazon was and is a writer who collaborated with the poet on several projects and their relationship, while stormy, was more amicable in the parting than his with the first Panther.

We asked her if she would be interested in addressing this volume of works, and we are delighted that she assented:

My name is Brigit and I've been told I am a goddess.

If I am, then I was conceived and born in the shadow of the original Panther, the walls of my nursery papered with the famed Panther Cycles.

I am the Crimson Panther, and have two notable companions: The Black Panther and the Golden Leopard. I have been asked to give my thoughts on the works written to my predecessor (The Black Panther) and have gladly accepted the task.

The Panther Cycles are amazing, beautiful and painful. Even as the successor to the pedestal of the Black Panther, I can truly appreciate the heart behind the poetry. One of my favorite works is The Penetrating Rose. Perhaps you find it odd that one muse would find the work written to another so enthralling. Though I am a fickle cat, I am an appreciative one and often am amazed and delighted by works inspired by other muses. As a matter of fact, in defense of my own oddness, I offer up one glimpse into my psyche. When I discovered there was a certain woman who thought that she was Brigit, rather than being indignant I was uproariously amused. Given my tendency to find humor where there should be none, any other of my erratic behaviors should be understandable. And with that introduction, let me proceed without caution.

I had several occasions to speak with the original Panther. I found her in general to be sweet, albeit very normal. I dare say the word average and note that I find nothing wrong with being such. I merely point it out because I find that perhaps it was that very state of ordinary that pushes us into a state of extraordinary. I found myself wondering what process goes on inside the poet's mind that can take something plain and turn it into something so fabulous. But then I suppose therein lies the beauty of William's poetry. He can take something others might overlook and create something out of it that is impossible not to look at and in looking at it, the viewer must draw in their breath and revel in the creation.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Often when I read William's poetry in the "Panther's" honor I have difficulty associating the words with the woman, but after coming to realize that he is very generous in his emotions, I was able to put aside what I knew as reality and see the works for what they are.

What are they? In my humble opinion the Panther Cycles were written to an ideal as opposed to an actual reality. He took emotions that were real and built around them a city of work that was grandiose and beyond what reality had to offer him. I also believe that his work is so universally respected and admired because he speaks to some part of us that aspires to a greatness we have not yet found, or have merely glimpsed and wish for a fuller view of. And so I believe that an ordinary woman inspired something above and beyond simple normality.

Being a writer, I understand creation from nothing and on some occasions, creation from a little something. But I have yet to understand the creation of something so phenomenal from something so typical. And therein lies the beauty of the Panther Cycles. William has taken a grain of sand and built a castle out of it. A castle that I believe will stand the test of time and be admired by generations to come.

My final words before you dive into the (several) pages ahead of you:

In a world full of ugliness, William has given us a port of safety and beauty. To read his poetry is to escape, if only for a little while. To be allowed to soar on the wings of someone else's experience is a gift that should never be taken lightly. The Panther Cycles are full of light and pain, darkness and ecstasy. Anyone who reads them will be a better person for it. I wish you a pleasant journey through the Panther's world and hope you will come away refreshed and renewed.

With love,

Brigit

The Mountain Poet Speaks

Editor's Note: Daniel McTaggart is a poet that William F. DeVault first encountered on the Author's Den website, and they became fast friends and collaborators. Known for his rich and empathetic "blue collar" works about the beauty of everyday life, Daniel's first book, "Midnight Muse" is due sometime later this year

The book you are about to read is very brave and very honest. It is not so much a "diary of a love affair" as it is an anatomy of a candle burning brightly at both ends. It is the exploration of a love affair so intense that both partners walk away brushing off the rubble of their emotions.

My name is Daniel McTaggart and I am an outsider to the world of the panther. I have not known its intricacies, but I have seen the eyes of a man who has since been elevated beyond the status of being mere prey.

I first met William in the Summer of 2002. He had been away from Morgantown, West Virginia for some time and had returned to do a few poetry readings around town. The one at The Blue Moose Cafe is where our paths first crossed. And where I received my first glimpse into the panther's realm.

I had known nothing of his life till that point. But I was thrilled to meet a published poet from my hometown. Perhaps that is how a dark echo of the Panther Cycles found its own corner in my mind. I approached him and mentioned I was also a poet interested in being published.

Over the next couple years, we'd exchanged a few e-mails while he was living in L.A. He then returned to Morgantown in mid-2004 and that was when our friendship took root. We would occasionally meet at places around town and discuss poetry: what it is and what could be done with it. The more we met, the deeper those discussions became. And the more excited I became about poetry. My output for that year alone outdistanced that of the previous two years combined. But enough about me, now.

A few months prior to this writing, we were sitting at the Book-n-Bean in Fairmont when he mentioned publishing "The Compleat Panther Cycles." I was biting into my bagel sandwich when he proposed that I write an introduction to said book. I didn't believe him at first, but his penetrating eyes did not lie. I knew then I was committed to reading more than 600 poems. And then writing about it. An intimidating task.

This is probably the most ambitious book of poetry I've ever picked up, let alone seen. And I knew I had to understand the panther before writing anything. From reading these works, I came to realize the panther is a creature motivated by emotions and whims. Moving not out of reason, but of unexplainable urge. Like a housecat that suddenly has to be in the next room. Aware of the broken vase only after knocking it over.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

In this book, you will find works that may make you smile, weep, or shift uncomfortably. An example of the former is "warm apples on a summer day" from the 62nd cycle. The title is worthy of Robert Frost. As for the poem, I could not help but draw comparison to Adam and Eve. The major difference here is that Adam offers the apple to Eve. And there is no serpent to induce temptation. Any sin that may be committed by these two lovers will be done on their terms. With no voice of disharmony whispering into their ears.

Of course, all the poems are open to interpretation. The relationship between a panther and her prey is fluid and so should be the meaning of each poem. They should each mean something different to each of us with similarities reflected in every reader's eye. You may like some and hate others. But that's the nature of a relationship that bounces between both ends of the emotional spectrum. Which poems are highs and which are lows are depths you must dare to plumb on your own. I wish you peace upon the joy of your discovery. It should be an interesting adventure.

Daniel McTaggart
"The Mountain Poet"

A Twist of Fate and Contemplation

*Editor's Note: Barbara Holmes conducted what many consider to be one of the best interviews with the poet, a few years back, for **Emotions Magazine**. In addition, she was for a long time one of the managers of the Writers Club area on America Online and was a contemporary associate to both the poet and the Panther during the affair that inspired these works*

"I write, not from the conscious, but the preconscious. Then, in reading what I revealed, I see what is actually moving beneath the surface." - William F. DeVault, 1998

One long weekend in 1996 he taught himself HTML, and built his website City of Legends. Weeks later we found him crowned by Yahoo as the "Romantic Poet of the Internet."

When asked to write an introduction to his new book my first thought was overly simple. These poems need no introduction, they speak for themselves. It is you, William, you the poet, the man, the creator of this poetic world who needs introducing.

To craft such a metropolis of cycles and solitaires built around, how you once described "karmic snapshots", of experiences is truly one's gift.

William and his world have been well characterized over the years. He himself is an extremely multifaceted individual. Well humored, frighteningly intelligent co-existing aside a matching ego. Yet in reflection one must consider this, is it truly an overly indulged ego or simply a man who is exceptionally self confident in his skill.

They've been equally compared as mysteriously captivating; keenly romantic, passionate, all the while incredibly spiritual. An "admired lover." I asked him several years ago during an interview which portrayal would be the most satisfying. He responded "I couldn't see only one spectrum and live a life content. If I were forced to chose, I would chose the spiritual, as in the end, God gave me this terrible gift/curse and I owe all love and allegiance... But I would hope, in wisdom, God would not do such a wretched thing to me."

In 1997 his first book "PanthEon" barely touched the actual 643 poetic anthology of Panther Cycles. Wanting to include the most popular and to provide the reader with a variety of styles only 9% made it into final production.

What we have unleashed in the Compleat Panther Cycles is basic raw emotion. Powerful, pure unedited thought from the first word to the last. Well known to most, his style of not editing his work comes from an impenetrable form of distrust. He doesn't trust his conscious mind to judge his unconscious. The flow of the moment, the surge of unrestricted inspiration is what we find at the end of his pen.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Is this how legends are born? One can only hope.

Continue on and unearth a lost soul, a forgotten memory, for it will be revealed through these works whether you read for pleasure or purpose.

I am neither Goddess or Panther - But Friend.

Barbara Holmes

A Word from the Amomancer

July 18, 2005. Ten years since the first of the Panther Cycles fell like beads of sweat from my pen, written to a female colleague who had sent me her picture on the Internet. Something about her eyes. Very soulful. That was that.

Two weeks later I wrote the Second Panther Cycle. Things kinda/sorta took on a life of their own, particularly after we spent a weekend together in New York, just before the Seventh Cycle. Having been in an unhappy marriage for several years I was not too resistant when she expressed her desire to be "more than a mistress"...so after a mighty war with my conscience I asked for a divorce on January 1, 1996.

All hell broke lose and I found myself penniless and forced into exile, away from my children, in Los Angeles. Guilt over that drove her away. Then she came back. Then she went away. Repeat. Repeat. It got pretty absurd. But tides make waves and waves make beaches and seashores and a place to dream.

Through it all I expressed the moments in the Panther Cycles, until the final one, the 93rd, in January 1997, four months after our final words.

These are the originals, except for the 8th Panther Cycle, which I destroyed immediately upon writing. I had caught her in a lie about her relationship with another man, and the writing of that cycle, while cathartic, produced damnedably toxic words, words I would not want as part of my legacy.

The cycles themselves run to 643 poems. Some pieces are romantic. Some erotic. Some silly. Some are very short. Some of greater length. I am not completely happy with many of them, but all are children of the moment in which they were born, as any proper creative expression should be.

I will undoubtedly be criticized for not dedicating this volume to someone. But, to whom? To the Panther herself? No. That might disrupt her life and raise questions best left to future times. To the abstraction of the Panther? No, because I believe in my heart of hearts that there really is a panther out there. To some other lover? That would be perverse. Best to let them be themselves, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

Enjoi, and God bless.

William F. DeVault

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The First Panther Cycle: **Out of the Night**



I have been asked, on more than one occasion, “Why a panther?”

It’s not complicated. I had just recently begun experimenting with two elements in my poetry: cycles, or sets of works revolving around a common theme; and totems, abstract references to people in my life, allowing me the freedom to take a metaphor and run with it.

When I told her I was going to write a cycle of poems based on the photo she’d sent me, and asked for a totem, she suggested a lioness. I didn’t like it. Too maternal.

After a brief exchange (all in AOL Instant Messenger, I might add, as we did not actually speak on the phone until several weeks later) we settled on a Panther. She was sleek and lean, there was an intensity to her that befitted a melanistic leopard, and she told me of the black Speedo she liked to wear while bicycling.

It’s that simple.

I sent her the cycle (you will note I had not yet fixed on the “seven pomes per cycle” rule) and she melted. And I figured that was that...I have always been able to take pleasure in the pleasure others derive from my works without expecting anything more from the situation.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

brooding eyes

felicity and cunning claws.
hunger in the hunter's jaws.
angel's heart and devil's prize.
the panther prowls with brooding eyes.
soulful eyes and soulless dreams.
maddened by the new will's screams.
mortal. and yet, set apart
by what is locked within her heart.

where are the daisies?

where are the daisies they promised today?
where are the clouds and the soft summer sun?
why is it over? had it begun?
and what are the shadows that fall on my way?

are there no answers to questions of love?
are there no masters of dreams left awake?
is there no barter for what winters take?
is there no justice for the blood of a dove?

at the end of the world, it all falls away.
falls into nothing? or something unseen?
are the leaves on the trees in paradise green?
and there do the daisies remain every day?

transient heart

O transient heart.
homeless and vagabond.
careless and sad.
gentle and mad.
the heart of a sinner. the heart of a saint.

a corridor of ancient mirrors

amotations to a cipher.
affections from afar.
catching lightning in a bottle
or religion in a jar.
the penance of the player
is the arrow through the heart.
Psyche steals her lover's arrows
to play vengeance for her part.
and the Muses (so amusing)
find great humor in this game,
spinning words upon a deathloom,
selling stockings to the lame.
Bragi bleeds another rhyme scheme
and then sells it for a drink
from the horn of Aphrodite,
with a dark flirtatious wink.
and this Venus, for her ardor,
is seen in the moonlight's glint
off the sheen of sweat-soaked lovers,
striking sparks without the flint.
and the spectral specters sobbing,
yet request another chance
to invoke dark Hades' melody.
and lead in a new dance.

night stalker

in the night.
in the jungle.
in the depths of sad despair.
there's a presence.
in the branches.
you can't see her. but she's there.
watching closely.
taking measure.
are you predator? are you prey?
and if either.
does she leave you?
does she seek to pounce and play?
and if neither.
does she linger?
and then fall. into your trap?
will the hunter.
be the hunted.
when she hears the steeljaw snap?
will she struggle?
or surrender?
will she know. you mean no harm?
understanding.
like the panther.
that this fire can be warm?
it is quiet.
in this jungle.
if you listen. with your soul.
and this silence.
calls the panther.
to protect it. and patrol.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Second Panther Cycle: **Aphrodite's Fountain**



A few weeks after the Panther Cycle, this one slid in under my preconscious radar. I didn't know it was coming, I swear. It just showed up at the tip of my pen one day.

I sent it off to her, all the while thinking "Uh oh, this hasn't happened before."

In this cycle I began to insinuate elements from her creativity and our ongoing discussions. Mind you, at this time, there was still no real sense of anything other than a few random flirtations. I was married, she was recently separated.

Note, in particular "Miranda".

She was working on a novel and there was a chapter she shared with me that involved one of the female characters in the story having rough, but consensual, sex with a handsome cop in the back of his police cruiser. It was obvious from the way she wrote it and the way she discussed it (and that fact that she chose it to send me) that it was a sexual fantasy of hers.

How could I resist? You will find in many of the later cycles I incorporated her fantasies, both romantic and sexual, into the imagery of my work. I had begun feeding off of her desires.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Aphrodite's Fountain

I drifted, in a skeptic's trance,
beyond the sphere where shadows dance
and lovers pray for second chance
to merge like spring-swift rivers.

and in the jungles of the night,
two eyes were there, in brooding bright,
reflecting from an inner light
a hunger and a feasting.

the panther came in graceful stalk
to the fountain where the ancients talk
of heroes who weep and victims who mock
the memory of their passions.

and in the branches overheard
there lay a sentinel in his bed,
a dragon gold with eyes of red,
enwrapped in ardored patience.

his wings unfurled and blocked the sky.
he flew to the cat, and for a moment I
feared for her death and knew not why
she did not flee in terror.

and then the wonder was enhanced
by these two beasts in courtier's dance.
they swirled as though by fate entranced
around the sacred fountain.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

I did not watch, I did not see
if those two coupled neath the tree
that stands beyond the whispering sea
of pain and dreams and madness.

at length they lay, entwined and spent
and left me wondering what it meant
that they should care to be content,
this panther and her paramour.

strange beasts were they, and still they lay,
beneath that tree so far away,
next to the font where angels play.
and smile at their communion.

miranda

you have the right to remain silent.
but I love to hear those pleased sighs
that fade away, to then again arise
with every soft impalement.

enamored

with every imagining of you I grow focused.
like through a virtual lens I watch you in my mind.
and my heart. and my soul. and I know you.
not in every thing and every way.
but there is a resonance here.
dark and terrifying, like the sudden
revelation at the end of the first act.
sweet and exciting, like the venom
of a kiss that contains promises and oaths,
borne of the touch. the taste. the warmth
that shelters your dreams and awakens
you at night to a lover who is not there.
yet.

the dream

she is there.
dancing like the flame of a match. catching
the light off her soft ebon pelt.
the sheen is quite exotic. erotic, even.
the dream retains the theme.
the shared taste of fresh prey.
the madness of passions untempered,
but shaded by an honest reverence. fer de lance
striking. the warm wine venom.
and the effortless, infinite
caress that lasts well into the next day.

playing the gallant

when you are sad. think of me.
and know that I would make you smile.
at any cost. for, when I see
someone too worthy for despair to defile,
I must play the gallant. riding high
to slay the dark demons that would caress
only your sorrow. for selfish am I.
and want all of you, even your darkness.

to inspiration in the eye of the panther

you are the midwife of my creation.
paramour to that which is, from me, immortal.
I am but parasite to the beauty who has won
the eye of the poet. Odysseus to the siren's call.

to earn your favor, I would drink a vessel
from the geysers of your soul and curry favor
from a deadly jungle hunter, swift and sensual,
holding back my caresses as a Herculean labor.

passion spawns a pitiful pawn, bound
in all his splendour like a chrysalis.
a worm to weave soft word silks, sound
to be draped upon you like a crafty lover's kiss.

The Third Panther Cycle: **The Rainbow**



Now comes the first of the external allegorical cycles. I took the notion that a cycle should have about seven poems, and the fact that the standard spectrum is considered to have seven colours, and ran with it.

I had some fun with this, and discovered that starting from the theme enabled me to explore in directions I had not previously wandered. It was a hit with her, and I believe it was the first one that I shared with several of my online friends in the AOL Writers Club.

Some people have asked me about the angle of the final piece “the violets”. That one took from an old show business story about Blake Edwards and Julie Andrews. Supposedly before they had ever met, he was quoted on a talk show as saying he wouldn’t want to work with the “Sound of Music” star because she came across so wholesome, as if she had violets “growing down there.” According to legend, she sent him an arrangement of violets. They were married, or so the story goes, a year or so later.

It’s amazing what having a mind for seemingly meaningless trivia can do to expand the palate that one writes from. I always encourage my proteges to read everything they can...just not poetry. I want them to have a broad wealth of knowledge to draw their metaphors from, not forever singing just one song with differing words.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Also, note at the end of that piece, my first use of repetitive language for reinforcement...”and dream/ of a dream of a dream of a dream of a dream.” It makes for a nice tailing off at the end of a public (or private) reading.

By now she had even taken it so far as to create a new screen name containing her totem. That we were forever openly flirting in the Writers Cafe while I was releasing these works to the world did not seem to indicate to either of us that anyone would perceive us involved.

Love can be blind. Eloquent, but blind.

the red

ruby-blue and scarlet, crimson when you dare.
a flood of blood and fire, a shadow on your hair.
passion spun to lash upon our dreams and hopes and prayers.
ember eyes are looking out from in their cunning lairs.

the orange

fresh. sweet. like a succulent mouthful of citrus,
tangerine and tart. the heart of the flavor, savored
for a dancing pleasure. the leisure of love, crisp
and inviting. biting. it covers your tongue with life,
and your senses dance like a sweet panther on the beach.
the rind and pith and juices. exploding. serious
and playful. like shy lovers, holding hands when shed
clothes and inhibitions are on their mind. a liar's lisp
gives her away. and the flickering jazz of the night, rife
with pleasure and promise and a flavour of life, within reach.

the yellow

incandescent fire of the sun and the stars
radiating in pure lines. unrefracted. undistracted
by the albedo hearts that never burn.
cold they are, and wasted. we have tasted
their fruit and found them wanting, haunting
our memories and poisoning our dreams.
we who burn shall sweep the ashes of our
phoenix riders from our shoulders and set
once more the course for the edge of the world.

the green

new life.
pure and pacific.
again.
children of the dawn.
alive.
love and monuments
to love.
the blessed blending
of lives.
two become both one,
then three.

the blue

on the frostwinds that cut like daggers of steel
and peel back the flesh to show that we conceal
ourselves beneath these warm charades, afraid
to end the midgame, defending this masquerade,
depending on the dreams of the damned, and all
I ask is a sliver of time. of prayers that fall
numbly from the lips of our memories. cold
and grave. lovers, like monuments, grown old
and their reasons for having ever been are faded
like an inscription writ in the air by jesters jaded
in their pursuit of the mockery bidden by the court.
the courtiers and courtesans and kings of every sort
that twisted us and turned us to take a merry bow
in the dance of dark directions that contorts our every vow.
and all I want is serenity. and you. and lost time
of yesterdays and yesternights, twilight blue the crime.

the indigo

the dance moves on and leaves the dancer.
weary and consumed, slicked with sweat,
but hungry for the next movement. pirouette
and jete. the pounce of an eclectic panther,
given voice. given choice. in this darklight
she chooses. maybe well. maybe not. the night
will tell the tale. but I will not. in the glow
of her eyes, the chase will end when she says so.

the violets

a thousand dainty flowers, fragrant and sweet,
growing in a bed not given to recent gardener's care.
needing tending and words of encouragement.
the master's hand. the touch of one who cares
what may spring from the bidding loam from
which spring these sweet flowers. I nuzzle
this luxuriant bed of subtle, fragrance and dream
of a dream of a dream of a dream of a dream.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fourth Panther Cycle: **I Dreamed a Dream**



She wanted children. Our discussions had taken a more linked view, somehow considering the possibility that we might actually meet. That there might be something “there”.

One of the topics was children. She was in her late thirties and had never had children, but wanted them badly. She considered the idea of being pregnant incredibly sensual. By now we had begun talking on the phone, and much of our talk was her imagining what it would be like to get pregnant, to be pregnant, to give birth, to breast feed.

And, I lurched into the fantasies, dead on. I found her enthusiasm, her excitement, exciting. The final piece in this cycle is called “seventh month” and describes an emotional tableau of holding her while she is pregnant and us reveling in the entire idea. I drew heavily on my own emotional memory from my wife’s two pregnancies (yes, I know, in some ways that is very sick, but I am being honest about this) and the Panther’s own intensively detailed fantasies.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

redemption

first dance. last chance
to turn away. people say
many things and time brings
both joy and pain. I will remain
until betrayed by the dust flayed
by the fall of time. a lover's crime.
repented. forgiven. for love given.

inamorata

how beautiful you are to me is not a question
I may answer. words fail and you are bright
and incandescent, a flaming taper in oblivion.
I draw my inspiration from your love, shadow
of your light. memory of your words. priest
to the need to worship one who stirs such awe
in my all too mortal soul. seeds of doubt? I
have none. and when the seeds of this love
are manifest, I will be there to witness them.

wedding bed

sated and slaked. thirst and hunger bound for now
in a cunning, sleeping smirk. short work of mingling
flesh, leaving an indelible mark on the paths we shade
and will follow to the edge of sanity. vanity must bow
to humility in the face of your passions, nerves set tingling
by your very approach rise and worship the vows we've made.

jungle passions

like liquid ink.
a shadow dances a deadly dance.
hungry and hunter.
the panther is awake and will
take her feed of me now.
and I will not protest.
or resist.
for I hunger for her as well.

heartbeat

I listen to your heart.
beating softly in your breast.
my eyes are closed and I am lulled
by the knowledge that you live
and love for me. the thinnest part
of this is that to any test
I may put our love, this fading world
is witness to our victory in the love we give.

transfiguration

in the wasteland of our lives, there are vines
that wind us with their silvery stems, binding
us to the truths and lies we have uttered and heard.
taking our drink at the well of folly and in the cup
of both holy communion and poisoned dreams. drink
deeply the blood of my heart, freely and of your will,
take your fill and I, I shall be transformed by this.
brought from wretched wreck to mortal, then
transfigured in a moment of awakened passion
to immortal. and thus I may join you in the stars.

seventh month

I lay with you, my arms entwined about your quiet form,
my hands softly and reverently feeling the curve
of the chamber wherein lays the labor of our love.
beautiful angel, forged of our passions, summoned
by love, she rests and awaits her coming life.
and our coming joy at her birth. I am at peace
with this. filled with joy that she is ours and
will live as a glorious testament to our love and hope.
and I feel her stir within you. and I weep.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifth Panther Cycle: **The Legend Cycle**



I have always found this a curious cycle. Not fully realized, but more reactive to what was going on in my life and around me.

There had been plans for a large party of writers to gather in New York in the fall, but it was suddenly cancelled. Seeing this the opportunity for us to finally meet, we seized upon the work that had been done and I took over as host (despite the fact that I was living near Washington, DC, at the time...which made it a logistical challenge.)

I had also been getting some vibes from a few people that maybe I wasn't really aware of all that was going on around me. People pointing out that maybe I was not the only gentleman caller on the Panther's dance card. I approached her on this, and she assured me that, while she did like the attention, she was not currently seeing anyone or planning to see anyone while we were evaluating our situation.

I took this at face value, despite my nagging doubts, and pressed on. I was slowly getting myself into a realm of deception with my real life associates and my family that was beginning to eat away at me. I think this comes out in the poetry, as I try to keep the idealized relationship on mythic footing and away from the mundane.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

One element that first reared its head in this cycle were the “sand angels”...a fantasy of hers was to make love on the beach and I told her that would probably leave something like a snow angel in the sand, a sand angel. From then on that became our code phrase for having been thinking about making love.

half truths

cold and calculated.
the odds are not discreet.
sad and surrogated.
the world lays at your feet.

timelines and semantics.
riddles for the dawn
games we play in earnest
are back before they're gone.

stepping on the wire

warm flesh and impending memory
dreams cold and cut like fish in the bin.
sin. time spins a bottle full of venom
to the edge of where we've been.
do not expect my sympathies
if your tale is not well told.
too often iron pyrite
is bartered out as gold.
and I am left with the fool's debit
cashed upon my heart.
burned beyond remembering
where the game did start.

idols of glass

tempest is not truth. power is not fact.
and lies in their essence are not the evidence of tact,
but of deception. perception burned like lightning
in the atmosphere of the high heavens...where the gods play
daily...talking the talk...walking the walk
as they glibly fade away.

the Gordian nut

severed memories.
the silver cord is cut.
I float away in reveries
before the Gordian nut.

for in it is the riddle,
and etched upon its shell
are the ciphers and sad sinisters
that pave a road to hell.

rebirth

I wandered, content and memory purged,
my soul unblackened by the waters of time
and the tests of truth. reason had returned.
and so I found myself by that stream. the sweet
and bitter river by whose banks I had slit the throat
of the dreamhart. the nemicorn.

and there, on the shoals of blasted sand and
edge of truth I saw. nothing. time and picking
of the birds had left not a trace of that fragile
frame. I smiled a sad smile, acknowledging
the past and the clarity with which it now lived.

when my reverie was broken. first by the voice
of a friend. new, but steeped in ancient familiarity.
I turned. and fell to my knees in blistered awe. I saw
a new nemicorn arise from the sand. in form more perfect
than the fabled beast, speaking with the tongue of a friend.

and I was sundered to my core by the mix of mad emotion
brought to my lips, to my eyes, to my heart by this event.
this phenomenon undreamed and unbidden. she stood,
at a strange distance, apart and yet intimate. and regarding
me the soulful eyes, not of the slain prey, but of the
feeding predator. a new creation. a new totem.

and in my willful arrogance I touched this dreamhart.
this nemicorn that has lead me to my Rubicon.
her wounds, a beautiful statement of survival. of strength.
and the sniggering empathes now weep in jealousy and wonder.

sand angels

sand angels.
the wind blows the hollows flat in time.
and so shall it be with you and I.
but not before this run is done
and we have lived our lives together.

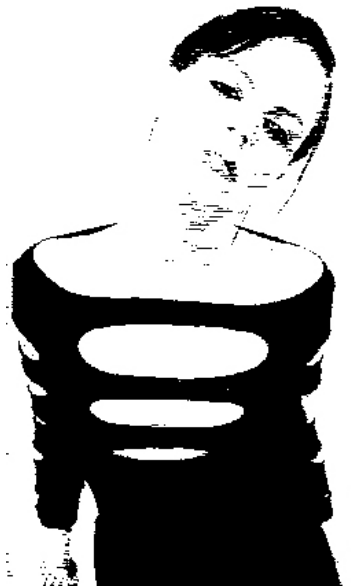
ghost dance

ghost dance. the banshee on the lawn
is gone now. her screams are but echoes
and so is the wight, burned by the light,
returned to his barrow. to lick his wounds
and dream of a day when he might prevail.
and we creatures of light shall fight
again. unbent if battered, and together.

possessiveness

I am jealous and zealous for every instant of your presence.
please forgive the arrogance I feel in wanting you by my side
forever and at all times. irrational, but sincere, and pride
demands I call your love. not a bluff. a gambler's chance.

The Sixth Panther Cycle: **The Joy Cycle**



This would be the final cycle before we met face to face. Emotionally, it is all over the map, but generally hopeful, romantic and positive.

This was the first use of one of my signature phrases, “phoenix and golem”. It reflects my dualistic nature, as I perceive myself both a spiritual person, capable of rebirth, as well as a soulless creation, built to a task. But in being either or both, I am fulfilling purpose, so I am satisfied.

I have started, by this point, writing of our children. The Panther had a specific dream of having two, a daughter and a son, and even had selected names for them. The daughter, Cassiopeia, figured heavily into many later works, and was even an abstraction I comforted myself with during the darkest times of my divorce and estrangement from my real life children.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the psalm of love/the lover's prayer

I thank you Lord
for the love that you have blessed me with
she is gentle
and generous of spirit. kind and loving
and full of life.
I thank you and am humbled by this woman,
who has set me
in her heart and offered to share so much.
amen.

rebirth

I have been tossed from rapture to the crush of
life so foul and grinding that I barely live. and yet
I endure for sake of love. a light, beautiful and singular,
illumes my night and shows me the path to the edge
of the universe, where waits hope and joy, twin beasts
shackled by their duty, to draw the chariot of love
across the skies of radiant peace and lover's dream.

ecstasy

the sound of your voice sends echoes across my soul
like the demon-purging rhythms of the kodo drums.
vibrant and intense, these feeling spread the wings
of my twice-born heart and give it the wind. it sings
like the voice of a multitude of angels, the wind comes
and blows away the sand. but it leaves the image whole.

child of love and eloquence

child of love and eloquence. I saw you today, floating
at finger's reach, smiling and cooing. your mother
stands beside me again and we await you. nothing
gives me greater joy than seeing your approach, nearer
and nearer you draw and I am hopeswept and wrapped
in an enraptured veil of peace and enamorment. I wait
for your arrival, celebrating with a song trapped
from an angel's voice and held immutable at hell's gate.

inevitability

eyes of burnt honey and smile of feral love. could
I have found anyone, anything to bring me more pleasure?
not merely of the flesh, but of the heart and mind.
you fulfill me and give me back that which I bartered
away a thousand lifetimes ago. I cannot remember
a moment in my life where I do not truly find
you there, or the coming shadow of your inevitability.
and you now are my soulbride, everything to me.

the penetrating rose

a flower pierced my heart
and brought forth the blood of life.
a dream of love forgotten
a consummation and a wife.

meander

I am phoenix and golem. soulless and reborn.
the son of memory. the father of dreams and fear.
look upon my fruits and know them by their totems.
truth is my iron. love, my tunic. and you, my soul.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventh Panther Cycle: **Romance in Realtime**



When there is a standpoint poem in a cycle or collection of cycles, I often refer to it as an “anchor piece”...something you can depend on to hold it out, up and solid.

“When first I chanced” was one of the first anchor pieces of the Panther Cycles. As I shared it with fellow writers I received an unprecedented response. Words of praise, words of encouragement and the occasional nude picture (some still were not certain if there was an actual Panther and wanted to get some of the romance into their life).

This was the first cycle written since we met face to face in New York (hence the “realtime”). It was the first time I invoked the “burnt honey” colour of her eyes (they are a light brown, caramel colour, and burnt honey just seemed to be a natural image, carrying sweetness and the damage that comes from just being an unrealized romantic).

The first poem to actually take shape in this cycle was “4 am” as it materialized in my head...at 4 am...in our hotel room. It is an accurate and earnest expression of what I felt in that moment.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

when first I chanced

when first I chanced to hear your voice
my heart stopped.
not for want of death, but because
nothing can change
in the space between beats of your heart.
and I wanted you
to forever speak my name. with reverence
and honest love.

when first I chanced to look into your eyes
burnt gold honey
in colour. my breath caught. the air
was no longer needed
to sustain my life. for in your eyes
my world held, strung
on wires of platinum and steel and dreams.
and honest love.

when first I chanced to touch your flesh
my life ended.
and began again. the minuet of life paused
and then continued.
and I was caught in the dance. intoxicated
by your warm hand.
by the sweet message in your smile. bold
with honest love.

when first I chanced to lay with you
the angels wept.
knowing what was in my heart, how could
they but regret
never knowing what passes between two lovers
caught in the sphere
where ends all reality and the truth is pure as
any sacrament.

when first I chanced to speak of love
you smiled at me.
and touched me with a hand that stole
my life. and spoke
with a voice that stopped my heart.
and looked on me
with eyes that caught my breath. and I knew.
I knew. I know.

baptism

baptized in the merged sweat of lovers,
we seek our own communion. a reunion
of strangers in time, but not in fact,
for we were long on this road that smothers
the heart and steals all hope and emotion
from so many. but serves to seal this pact.

4 a.m.

as you lay beside me in sleep I place my ear, gently
so as not to awaken you, against your flesh and listen
to the steady beat of your heart and the gentle flow
of the night air in and out of your lungs. and I weep.
for I love you so much. and your peace is beautiful.

morning

the night-parched sky welcomes the fire of the chariot
of the sungod as he cracks the line of the horizon, spurring
on his destriers. and his lance of the light prods us,
as we lay entwined on the cool wet sand of the beach.
and awakens us to the knowledge of what we have done.
and we are at peace with this. and one another.

before you go

I hope I die before you go.
for I am not ready for a life without your presence.
God is not so cruel, surely he
must plan me a swift and sudden death, remembrance
of what we have held and been would
be beyond the endurance of Job and more horrific
than any mere crucifixion.
I hope I die before you go. just don't look back.

the fire

soft and gentle. tears of lust and tenderness.
sweet amalgam of my steel and your platinum.
mettle forged in the heat of desire. the fire
that we stoked to a fury like Megiddo. bright
and incandescent, the light we lit. each caress
serving as an added flame to the conflagration
we shared. and dared. undeterred. the choir
of our sighs echoed in our temples. through the night.

patience

I have stood in the fire, awaiting your salvation,
counting on your faith and your love and your grace
for so long. the flesh will be consumed. but I.
I will linger. for I know you will return. no one
loves you as much as I do. no one shall ever place
as much trust in you as I do and will. no lie
obscures this truth, that I am given over unconditionally
to any judgement, test or fate your love would grant me.

The Eighth Panther Cycle: **Betrayal**

The story behind this cycle is short and not so sweet.

I was given information that, just days after our rendezvous in New York, the Panther was planning to entertain a gentleman caller at her home in Florida. Indeed, he was flying in for the weekend.

I confronted her with this information and she freaked out that I had found out. I told her she could see whom she wanted, but that I was not going to throw away my life on someone who was not sure if they wanted me or just “someone”.

She called him up and cancelled the visit. He was a regular in the Writers Club and took the cancellation badly. And, as he learned of my hand in it, he became a behind the scenes player against me. Nothing overt, just things he’d say when I was not around or email he’d send to people he thought should know “what kind of person” I was.

Anyway.

I was so angry that I had risked so much for so little (for a few tense hours it seemed she was on the fence) and I wrote a cycle of poems about how I felt in those hours. I read them, then destroyed them. I can recreate pieces of them in my mind, but they were so toxic, so unpleasant, that I could not bring myself to show them to the world, especially after the swift reconciliation.

But I marked their place to remind me that things are not always what they seem.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Ninth Panther Cycle: **A Slice of Heaven**



Sometimes you say something in a work and it doesn't strike you how dead-on it is to the moment, until someone else reads it and the lights go on.

So it was with the piece "influences" in this cycle.

Written just days after the Eight Cycle, as a healing expression of recommitment, I saw nothing so different than the previous cycles...but the Panther saw different.

The line "your part in my life is undefined, but monumental" caused her to break down, emotionally, and begin to cry. She explained that she did not want to have an "undefined" role. She knew what she wanted. She wanted to marry me and for us to have children.

I told her that, while it might take a little time for me to extricate myself from my current marriage, that I fully supported that.

And now the falling now made slick the friendly trails.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

chaos on a stick

flashing/slashing/emotions trashing
reality for a slice of heaven.
a prayer for seven
when any prime number is meaningless
in this gamble/ramble/shamble we make
of our lives in the name of love.
in the shame of love.

security

anchor me with your love, that I may stand against the winds
that blow us apart. heartfast and brave, I would adore you
near and afar until the ice forms on my barren bones.
remember me in your prayers, to whatever gods such angels
as you worship. for I need your strength tonight.

first sight

I locked eyes with you, that moment in the cafe,
when first we met. face to face. chance to chance.
no escape. captured in the glow of your laugh, prey
to the predator who will do me no harm. the dance
is not death, but elevation to a higher plane, where
angels regard our sweet confusion with sideways stares.

morning

I awaken and find you, to my delight, laying in my arms,
half asleep, burnt honey eyes staring softly into mine.
questions unasked. answers given nonetheless. shining
with passion radiant and sublime. I surrender to your charms
and kiss those gently smiling lips, and once again lose
myself in the rapture of my senses in your embrace.
feeling the warmth of your flesh and your smiling face
raising the waver of passionate prayers I can not lose.

influences

small hands. big heart. sweet smile. your part
in my life is undefined, but monumental.
you have refined and redefined my dreams, central
to the paths I will choose. win or lose, my heart
is yours. feed upon it if the need is great, share
with it if the feeling is upon you, but never doubt
my sincerity and commitment. my soul pours out
in pools of holy water to wash away your cares.

passion

a dance for two. the two become one, a majestic
private pirouette. cold fire of air and fantasies
given way to the heat of the warm wine and brisance
of newly refound joy. resounding like a cannon shot
across the bow of past lives, past follies consumed
in an instant of total absorption. shall I describe
how I feel in this instant, as it hangs motionless in
the air we share, in the dreams of the damned. the
penetrating rose retains its bloom and loses its thorns
in the gantlet of shared affections. a monument
erected by blood and hunger, by hands and hearts
unwilling to take the back seat, back row, back alley
routes so many would live with for a simple taste
of the confection that we live upon. and share tonight.

musings

I hold you to me, and feel the warmth of your body flood
my every sense with intense joy and well-being. seeing
you here, feeling you with me, sharing your mortal blood
in this communion of the damned, looking for love. being
all to one another we cannot be to ourselves. honest. fair.
builders and shapers. planners and warriors. standing
against the winds of the dawn. the storms slam the air
from our lungs and then speak our names. demanding
our obedience. I curse them for their arrogance. we are
a synergy. a memory of tomorrow. the essence is pure...
if not our intentions. I have traveled both long and far
to be with you tonight. and I will, for your love, endure.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Tenth Panther Cycle: **The Penetrating Rose**



Okay, now for the first truly controversial cycle. Controversial because of the move towards open eroticism in the works, although it was not fully realized until the next cycle.

Yes, this cycle was named for one of the poems in it, “the penetrating rose”.

And, yes, the poem accurately describes an actual scene from our time in New York.

Oh, don’t be so shocked. I should not have been there, but I was following my heart (or, at least, my hormones).

The fantasy was one that had been conceived by me in one of our long, darkly flirtatious phone calls and had immediately been seized upon by her as something she really, really, really found fascinating.

Note to those determined to act this poem out: Remove the thorns. I worked for a summer in a flower shop, so I knew to do that.

Strangely, one of my protégés, upon reading this cycle, declared it made her sad. The protégé who said that was in just a few weeks to be immortalized by *The Goldenheart Cycles*.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

invitation

subtle movements baring unsubtle hungers. a kiss
is not always just a kiss, but sometimes an offer.
an appetizer. a call to feelings held distant
and regarded with wounded disdain and a cold bliss
of withdrawn life from the surface of a new lover
granting joy and confusion. and dreams unrepentant.

sharing breath

sharing breath in the dimlight of another sphere. we are here
to make the new communion. vows broken. words spoken
with all their repercussions explored. we have ignored
for too long the fire and the phoenix. we had stood afar
and watched with love and lust and hope and trust made
manifest in our souls. now flesh made conduit for time
that rockets towards us unchecked, but with us more
aware of its ravages. and no longer afraid of lost dreams
and opportunities. for, in the false dawn of parted draperies,
we have found the pearl of self-revelation. one. for that
is how fate forged us. and we have only now realized our
incomplete complexities. but incomplete, no more.

the penetrating rose

the focus shifts to your hand. your soft hand. the hand
that brushes aside my hair to gaze into my eyes when
that is all we dare do for fear of showing the cards
of our hearts to the riverboat gamblers who charge
and bluff and cheat their ways across this game. with
firm and cautious resolve, you guide the penetrating rose
to its vase. or perhaps, to a new bed, rich and nurturing.
where it will take root. and grow strong as an expression
of passion and love. I stare deeply into your burnt honey
eyes and see the fire in them, as parts the impediments
to the penetrating rose. I see your eyes. I feel your eyes
locked into mine, sending fire and pleasure like some
great spiritual semaphore. a single sound escapes your lips.
and the penetrating rose slides softly into place. and
you brush aside my hair again, with the soft hand that
guided the flower to its new home. where it takes root.
and blossoms as your eyes, hand, heart and flesh desire.

impressions

nervous. playful. warm. willing.
giggling. trembling. exploring. gentle.
tender. hungry. cautious. merging.
merging. sharing. caring. passionate.
mad. consuming. melting. flowing.
burning. blending. burning. blending.
exploding. sweet. chaotic. dancing.
caressing. sweet. smiling. wet.
nervous. playful. warm. willing.

the precipice

I kiss you, gently. and watch the fire in your eyes flicker
and illuminate as you impale yourself. no hesitation.
just hunger and a desire to be fed. here, in this bed
of the penetrating rose, you beg the question of endurance
of hearts, of souls, of dreams, of flesh. and I have
not all the answers. but seeing you dance in the
garden, caught in the chaosfire of my passion. feeling
your hunger. feeling you draw fire from me...seeing
the look in your eyes as you become a marionette to your
feral needs, dancing on strings of flooding release.
the slippery slope of merging forms and hearts is with us,
you ride your dreams and illusions, and I feel you melting,
running as more than flesh merges. we verge on unity.
and, in a moment of flash and thunder, we leap from
the precipice. together. and are lost in ourselves. forever.

the communion of the warm wine

you smile that saintly sinner smile
and beg to take the communion of the warm wine.
you would taste my life upon your tongue
and dream of nothing more than what is.
reality, thick and luxuriant. listening
for my pleasure. measuring it in inches
and ounces and the warm, lingering kiss
of the flesh, deep and dangerous. and you
drink deeply and completely. and you smile.
seeing. hearing, feeling. tasting my pleasure.

melancholy/the morning after

here. in these plastic shells
we shape and polish and hone
to show in light of day, bone
and flesh. nothing is shared.
in the end, nothing is dared
but that which we discern
to be ultimately, to the turn
of events to cushion our hells.

The Eleventh Panther Cycle:

Seven Kisses



A rather complex cycle, built upon a theme: seven kisses.

Some of the pieces are clearly erotic, some are romantic. Stylistically I am all over the map, but that happens often in the more thematic cycles, as I feel empowered to play with form and style when I don't have to worry about keeping them linked by more than the theme.

I haven't run into a lot of poems about making love with a pregnant woman. I thought the imagery went well and to be honest, it positively put her in heat. A Panther in heat is a terrifying thing, on some levels.

The release of this one was delayed to my inner circle, as I was unsure how they'd take the fairly heady eroticism. I needn't have worried. People turned back flips over this one, and I was getting propositioned regularly by women online who thought they might be "the panther".

Note to future generations: There was one "Panther"...she was a real, flesh and blood woman. If you are her, you know it. Otherwise, it isn't you.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

introductions

except to God, there is a first time to all things.
so it was with us. fumbling. tumbling. gliding
down like waterfall eddies into each other's grasp.
lip to lip. eye to eye. a denim dress sliding
upward, like a shield raised in surrender
and greeting. no warmer comrade made than
in that moment. no welcome softer. or sweeter.
or so, so anticipated. soft and ripe, I peel
the fabric skin away to expose the beckoning
fruit and take my fill as you take yours.
and two nervous smiles give way to pleasure.
and a memory undiminished by time.

dark kiss

a warm kiss. low and inside.
sweet fire. desire and hunger.
a promise made of dark intent.
a gentle dental mental fury.

intensity upon intensity.
a terrible, wonderful fire.
higher. higher. flashpoint
and beyond. electric and eclectic.

you seize. and seize up.
too much. too much. like
a marionette on endorphin ice.
inarticulate pleasure turning to fear.

fear and excitement.
a barrier breached. the pleasure
of surrender. you don't remember
when the wall was passed. or how.

just the charge. the surge.
the large swelling of nerve ending
army ants consuming your consciousness
like a swarm of pleasuring wasps.

another kiss of the warm. it lingers
and the stingers drive home the venom
of ecstasy. and the fear freezes on lips
disabled by a cunning linguist's trips.

you float in blackness. unaware.
thrown upon the shore. helpless
and uncaring. oblivious to the lover
who patiently waits for your return.

while we are in you

a merged life. haploids joined to form newgrowth
inside your smooth, rounded form. I kiss the curve
of the skin of the chamber wherein we are together.
and lead you once more to the place where silent oaths
gave rise to new life. where we paired and dared
to show hope in tomorrow and our love. the sheer nerve
of lovers in this graceless age, the dark weather
of the careless night, grinding dust from what we shared.

I lay against you, and feel us in you. newlife, merged
and growing. synthesis and synergy. a one of us.
your eyes tell me your need for reassurance. your hands
speak volumes of love and passion. intimacy encouraged
in a time of great joy. passion and reverence. a touch.
a brush. a smile of knowing hunger. a tender thrust
of gathering blood, wishing to lock us in fused bands
of soulmetal and dreams. a moment that says so much.

I slide my angel hands down your hips and rest them on us.
the us that is within you. shared and conceived.
loved and living. the giving of the flesh. your song
is graceful and beautiful. for what is more sensuous
than a woman carrying the child of the man she loves
and who loves her? what is more honest than lust relieved
by lovers sworn and given? what is more right than the long
and thrilling fire that engulfs us? now. and you are so beautiful.

baby kiss

ten thousand times I've kissed that mouth, seeing it drawn
in contorted passion and measure of pleasure. now, I see it taut
with an intensity of fulfillment. a birth of dreamer and dream.
in comforted pain and attainment of life. the star is caught
in your soul's web and brought forth in a child's first dawn.

how rare it is to see such passion. were that I could stir from you
a smile as that which creases your face, exhausted from the effort
of giving ready flight to a new angel, born of a love supreme
among mere mortals, reverent and impassioned. no mere sport
of passion, this child conceived as lover's seal between me and you.

a thirsty kiss

she sleeps.
a newborn's peaceful
and honest rest, sated.
but you and I do not. not yet.
for there is fire in your eyes
and a lover's kiss to reconcile.

face to face.
an embrace
that entwines us.
your dancer's legs lock about me.
your hands cradle my face to you.
your body receives me with
eager and pleased abandon.

I kiss the sweat from your neck.
and trace the trail of a slow, seeping
path of whiteness from your breast.
and plug it with my thirst. not stopping
it, but draining eager nourishment
with my lips as your loins draw
eager nourishment from my flesh.

I feel your pleasure as you cradle
my face to you. the tension in your thighs
tells me all I need to know. and I
am thirsty for you and your love.
and drink greedily, draining you.
as you do to me.

wet kiss

a captive tropical rain, lush and cascading,
parading down your flesh, drawing out the fatigue
earned in hours of earnest, amorous battle.
the alien wetness feels so good, serenading
your flesh with new vigor and life. in league
with desire unrepentant, it renews the call
to you and I to touch. to taste. to feel. to share
again this joy of discovery. in a wet kiss of life.

the kiss of the reawakening rose

exhaustion. sweet and simple.
tired limbs, earning their rest and respite.
we lay, linked together in all
ways. slow and tempered, consciousness split
by the gentle, regular breathing of lovers, sated.

the penetrating rose awakens.
slowly it presses forth its stem. pushing aside
all barriers, seeking deep fen
to blossom. stretching out for the light inside
of a woman's passionate embrace. illuminated.

slowly you awaken to the bloom.
you marvel at the sensation of growth and reach,
as the rose seeks a proper room
in which to grow, in which to show its petals, teach
its lessons of passion and fire penetrated.

you reach back to me and touch
my face. I rouse and am aroused by the renewal
of the binding. the bonds of such
an exquisite vase, enhancing the rose through all
the shared sensations of the fire consecrated.

my tired limbs are reborn
and I pull you to me, burying deeper still the rose
within its proper garden.
and exhaustion has fled. and we kiss. again. nose
to nose. lip to lip. back to front. reinvigorated.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twelfth Panther Cycle: **The Wedding Cycle**



This cycle came at a time when we pretty much figured we knew what was going to happen over the rest of our lives: I would get a divorce, we could marry, have two children and live happily ever after.

Man plans, God laughs.

But, regardless of any future reality checks, I wrote this set, spinning off of the visions and images we were creating in our little cloistered corner of reality. Never mind that I had not yet asked for a divorce. Never mind that we had spent all of about forty hours in each other's actual presences.

I had gone from, in a matter of only a handful of months, someone who had never used the term "soulmate" in conversation to injecting in just about everything I wrote, so certain I was of the situation and its eventual outcome.

Man plans, God laughs.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

promises

the promise is made and the covenant sealed
between strangers no more, their passion revealed
in a reverent giving and taking of bonds
forged in their name, in their hearts, by their hands.

sonnet: the journey

I have stood at the edge of eternity and watched the gravel
beneath my toes fall away into the endless void. down
into the abyss. for so long did I wander free and travel,
deemed mad by all who saw the decade's dance turn brown
the greenery of my youth. alone and arrogant, I traced
the line of a shining path of cunning calculations culled
from my perceptions of life and love and god. and faced
with mortality, I laughed a hearty roar. and when called
by fate to answer for my sins, I took my cross with grace
and peace, knowing that truth was a better companion
than anyone I'd ever known. until now. I turn my face
from the lonely wind and hold out my hand to ask you join
this lonely quest. alone no more, for I have found worth
in one who shares so much and I would share my time on Earth.

processional

ever closer.
our souls draw ever closer.
bound to end in a binding
of a Gordian knot, blinding
us with joy we will remember
to remember.

purpose

we are not here for weakness relieved
but for strength buttressed in a commonality
of affection and respect. this derelict
heart has found a shelter where his skills
may be part of the whole, a solution
not a problem. and for this, he is forevermore
grateful and given. life lived for purpose.

rivets

words of respect.
words that deflect
those awkward, often times
when our hearts' petty crimes
would rob us of our dignity.
there is an infinite affinity
between kindred souls, resonance
that exposes the most chance
of variance between hearts brave
and given to hope as honor's slave.

synergy in white light

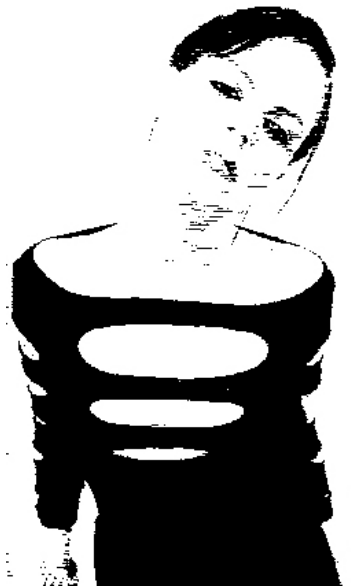
like a feedback loop of infinite power.
moment by moment, hour by hour,
my power grows. focused like a pure beam
of coherent light, like the newborn scream
of nuclear fire in a newborn star.

lancing out into the chaos night of
mortal weakness, the failure shown in love
forged in fires too cool to true temper
the iron of our hearts that would never
survive the memory of a love scar.

first dance

to the outward observer.
our first dance would have been an awkward affair.
slow and ponderous, we were
uncertain where to place our hands and arms, but where
we rested our limbs was not
as important as the quintessential why. for in this simple
expression of desire not
to proudly ignore soulmate found, we found our hearts graceful.

The Thirteenth Panther Cycle: **Panther On The Beach**



I was now experimenting with forms I had only dabbled with before, most notably the French sonnet form, the villanelle.

But, look closely at the poem “the Panther on the Beach”. There is a subconscious thread there, a part of me sensing that maybe I was the only one certain of our joined fate.

Note also the reference to “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”.

We all know how that turned out.

Foreshadowing was rearing its ugly head.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the Panther on the Beach

A poet's dream and invocation of dark divinity
spun of the ethereal webs of chance and sweet mortality.
A future memory calling of the panther on the beach.
Forbidden and forever. The rose, she grows just out of reach,
representing a resonant sweetness, nectar of a peach,
a poet's dream and invocation of dark divinity.
So innocently the Judas goat, la belle dame sans merci.
My blood, it burns in cascade turns, now in bondage to be free:
a future memory calling of the panther on the beach.
Hardwired, soul to sinew, as if the vengeful prophets preach
a fallen grace of lost face, disremembering what we teach.
A poet's dream and invocation of dark divinity.
I gaze, in rapt amazement, committing all to memory,
raging in a cage called propriety. A false dignity.
A future memory calling of the panther on the beach.
A visit to the edge of the enamored infinity.
Woven in words incarnate and the elegance of my speech.
A poet's dream and invocation of dark divinity.
A future memory calling of the panther on the beach.

rationale

if sometimes I seem possessive
or suspicious, please forgive me.
it is no count against you. I live
for your love and through my eyes I see
no reason for one as wondrous
as you to love such as I am, all too
mortal. and sometimes, this marvelous
gift of your love, bestowed on me through
no worthiness of my own, makes me fear
that one day you will regain your reason
and see me for all my unworthiness, not near
to all you deserve. and in this season
of senses reawakened, you will depart
as you came, a luminous herald of joy
unasked. the gem of wonder within my heart
that grants me the most perfect peace any
man has ever known. my derelict heart bleeds
to think one day I'll be insufficient to your needs.

a kiss of intent

you kiss like you mean it. as if every
touch and taste and warm embrace were
an expression of thinly restrained thirst
for the deepest draught of warm wine.
I return your passion, moved and very
ready to surrender all my restraints, sure
that I am willing to suffer the very worst
our merging could create. a brush with the divine.

my heart

I do not control my heart or muse.
they take will of their own and amuse
themselves sometimes, by what or who they choose
for me to be drawn to. Fisher-king bruise.

spike

we lay, together, serenity
reigning down on us in regal
splendour. it binds our pretty
words into cunning constructs, full
of meanings shared, passions dared
and the rich illusions we prepared
for such an occasion. shattered like
brittle glass on an upturned spike.

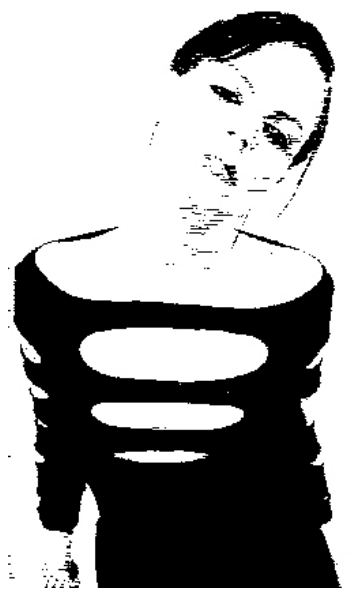
song

I love to hear your song.
sweet and transporting.
it fills me with longing
to share my life and bring
all my heart to stay forever
in your life's artistry.
to be with such as you and never
be less than what you need me to be.

Panther's Dance

Two legs, not four, she takes the floor
tracing out rhythms of desire and more.
The simple, sinful grace of the panther's dance.
I wasn't looking for beauty in an elegant romance,
but she drew me in, by her charm, by chance.
Two legs, not four, she takes the floor.
Such lovely grace and spirit, I'll sing forevermore,
and place it in history, this passion into lore:
the simple, sinful grace of the panther's dance.
The Renaissance of Italy, the Golden Age of France,
both faded, futile memories, within this lover's trance.
Two legs, not four, she takes the floor.
I cannot take my eyes from her, a poor
martyr an I to take her, yet for this I implore:
the simple, sinful grace of the panther's dance.
Her feline lines and feral smile, impossible to ignore,
and that I be her chosen, a most blessed twist of chance.
Two legs, not four, she takes the floor,
the simple, sinful grace of the panther's dance.

The Fourteenth Panther Cycle: **Panther Eyes**



The poetic cycle as therapy.

To me, this cycle is one of the most important to examine and evaluate. To consider, not just as art or literature, but as a mirror or a lens that the light of reality must bounce off of or bend through to emerge to the page.

The first piece, “Panther Eyes” is a well-wrought enough villanelle describing her eyes.

But the final three poems, there’s the Master’s Thesis waiting to be written.

“unworthy” frames me as perhaps an unfit suitor, my own doubts about myself, largely fueled by my infidelity, were eating me alive...the next few months would ravage me, emotionally.

“scrutiny” is a simple observational work, examining a moment from our meeting in New York when she left the table to find a waiter. She wanted lime in her Diet Coke, he had brought lemon. I watched her as she moved away, fully aware that I would almost certainly be seeing her far more intimately in just an hour or two, but admiring her grace and beauty.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

“felicific” a vision of happiness, of good fortune. A vision of her, watching Cassiopeia chase butterflies on a sunny day. It was an image that made her always feel good, and I believe at the time I wrote it the purpose was to calm her down, as her guilt feelings were beginning to gnaw at her, as well.

panther eyes

burnt honey eyes, rich and rapturous.
a hunter's hunger made perilous.
eyes aglow with passion and delight.
smile affixed in soul's coherent light.
framed in dark illusions of the night.
burnt honey eyes, rich and rapturous.
the moment the fire consumes us.
I cannot look away, flesh made porous.
eyes aglow with passion and delight.
later, alone in the swirl of bright
memories, I see your smile, so right.
burnt honey eyes, rich and rapturous.
sitting in a crowd of friends, to us
there are more than words connecting us.
eyes aglow with passion and delight.
all I need is your glance to feel thrust
into the chaos of passionlight.
burnt honey eyes, rich and rapturous.
eyes aglow with passion and delight.

simple pleasure

shall I write poems of passion
that raise the peoples' fire?
shall icons of you I fashion
to stand, idols of desire?
or better should I treasure
every moment that we claim
and seek the simple pleasure
of a common home and name?

the kernel

in the furnace of my desire, the inferno
will burn away all doubt of my truth, and you
shall be left with the immutable kernel comprised
of my love. harder than fallen star's steel.

and, in your timely examination, you shall know
the purity of my love. the heat, beyond blue.
beyond violet. and you shall be left with a gem prized
above all mortal treasures. a piece of something real.

wings

If I were to play Daedalus
and fashion you your wings
I would not build from feathers
and bind with wax and strings.

Instead I would seek butterflies
and beg them from my plight
to share with you their chrysalis
so you may, the winds, alight.

For such is your perfection
you need no graver lift
than the scarcest hint of summerwings
to bear Aphrodite's gift.

unworthy

I have always been what I should be
to brace your strength and set you free
from all your demons and diversions. weak
am I, clay with flecks of gold. but I seek
to be what you need. accept me back, take
me for all my flaws and failures. this snake
does no more wish to seek to bring you suffering
than you would ask for such a false bartering
of intentions. do not reject me and I will see
your joy as great as it can be made, as my duty.

scrutiny

once.
when you were unaware of my scrutiny.
I watched you cross the room and I
marveled at your form and elegance
as you made poetry of simply motion.
filling my heart with inspiration
that even now, months later, I can
recall with sweet fondness and emotion.

felicific

a vision. a woman, undoubtedly you
by her stance and form and essence.
standing at the window. watching
a child chasing butterflies across
a field of wildflowers. and smiling
as the afternoon sun warms them
both. and the clouds are always white.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifteenth Panther Cycle: **The Goddess Cycle**



When in doubt, go back to the thematic cycle.

For this one I chose from the goddesses of several ancient mythologies to depict aspects of the Panther and women in general.

Mixed results, but this was a good exercise in seeing how well I could identify patterns, images and tendencies that were starting to emerge. Most notable? I was lying to myself. The mere choice of the theme should have warned me that the “deification” process had begun, I was dispensing with the human woman and replacing her with something divine and perfect, flawed only as a goddess would be flawed, issues of temperament rather than fragility or dishonesty.

Under the growing stress of seeing my marriage dissolve, and the subtle condemnation of some who had seen through the ridiculously thinly veiled disguise, she was buckling, scared, feeling isolated and condemned.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Idun, Norse Goddess of Youth

You share your apples. Thoughts and dreams carved
of springtime desires, forged in the sun to grant me
my wagered immortality. Conceptuality set free
to grant me the life I would share, as a man starved
for the essence, the truth of love and beauty bright
with promise and youth. And I would take a bite.

Ishtar, Egyptian Goddess of Love and Fertility

Sands of time. Sands of crime against the pillars
of passion. Love wasted, never tasted from wells
cut in the sandstone of the arid deserts of life.
The wind blasts our souls and demands sacrifice
of our failed desires. Fires that burn in tapers
of wax and gold, stolen from the illuminated shells
of our still living sarcophagi. The ritual knife
that peels away the withered skin as falsehood's price.

Bast, Egyptian Goddess of Cats

I have often wondered what it would be like to be
in a body feline in nature. graceful. predatory.
like the cat-headed goddess I saw in the museum.
proud and beautiful. she is able to be free
on her own terms. to live. to love. her history
irrelevant like a lover's dream uninvoked in fear.

Brigit, Celtic Goddess of Fire and Poetry

your words are like the sparks that light the kindling
hidden deep within me, like a slumbering, flammable
giant, unaware of his hibernation until the awakening
in the arms of a woman both beautiful and capable.

Aphrodite, Greek Goddess of Love and Beauty

lovely you are. lovely and love-worthy, like
a child of the Gods. herself a Goddess. I am struck
speechless and mindless and without will
by the power of your beauty. the duty of love
if to expose the truth magnified in the dove
of peace and the raven of mourning. the fill
of my soul by the light absorbed by the luck
of my eyes being open when you entered my life.

Tyche, Greek Goddess of Good Fortune

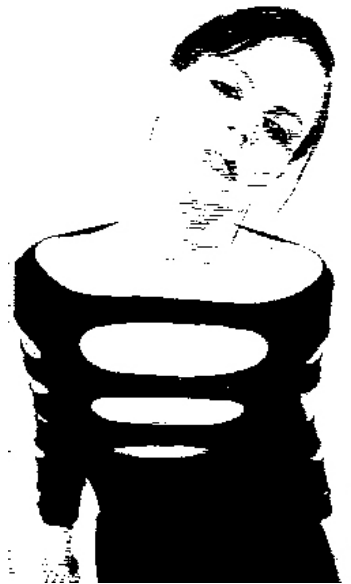
a twist of fate. the card turned to fill the open straight
is insufficient. sometimes. but not today and the trove
is mine. a thousand lives worth of wealth in the kiss
of an angel of dark grace and the fire of Erin her soul.
a worthy paramour. a peer. an unasked victory. lucky
at cards or lucky at love? I fold. for I have won all,
all I will ever need in this life. and an content.

Isis, Egyptian Goddess of Fertility

whether the seeds of my love, nurtured and perfected
the bosom of our twin-helixed hearts and souls, or the
germination of our offspring in your nurturing flesh,
I am awed by the shared moments we are granted
in this life to make our creation manifest. I love you.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Sixteenth Panther Cycle: **Dark and Light**



“dreams of goldenhearts and remnant of red” opens this cycle

A crack in the wall. It was at this time, during a particularly strained point at my relationship with the Panther that I penned “The Goldenheart Cycles” which have been argued as a fitting rival to the Panther Cycles for the top of my artistic pyramid.

Apples and oranges. Or rather, jungle cats versus Neil Young songs.

The Goldenheart was a protégé of mine who was in sharp contrast to the Panther and in our discussions of poetic form and themes, she had touched a part of me that had remained uncut in the early months of my relationship with the Panther. Innocence.

There was no illusion of innocence here. I was cheating on my wife, preparing to ask for a divorce so I could marry my separated yet-to-be-divorced girlfriend I’d met on the internet then bedded in a New York hotel (okay, a nice hotel, but nonetheless...)

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

While this cycle continued a string of well-wrought and introspective expressions of my heart, the emergence of this single line should have flagged me that I was yearning for a purification, a lustration, from the guilt I was caving under. The Panther was fading even faster than I, despite a second rendezvous, this time in suburban Virginia, near where I lived.

I was keeping it together by a thread and my perversely inhuman cardio-vascular system was the only thing that stood between me and a massive coronary or a stroke.

I was in full amomancy now, invoking her favourite images and fantasies to keep her near, to give me some comfort, but she was more drained than I by now.

conflicts

dreams of goldenhearts and remnants of red,
the curtain drawn on an antique bed.
remembering what I thought, remembering what I said.
we are not what we were, but more.

the proof is in the shadows, the fire in the dark,
the joy is in the bitter tears, wept angry and stark
alone. we are blindfolded by fate, at the mark
where the cold bodies wash on shore.

walls

the walls come down,
blasted by the heat of our passions.
as the twisted bricks crawl and seek
to resurrect their form before
we can kiss again.

defiance

the winds of time are not always warm and gentle.
they churn and twist. puffs of air to hellish screams
that would rip the flesh from you in a mental
hurricane. category 6. and all the dreams
must cling to you, their nails dug in. stand.
take the blast. lash to the mast of ego
your desires, your dreams of a distant land
that was beneath your feet a moment ago.

dragonrise

who are you, to awaken me?
I have slept longer than many
have lived. and by choice this voice
has long been silent. can you see
the shadows on my wall? a penny
for my thoughts would price
me out of the market. I would
wrap you in my wings when I
ascend, but I need them to catch
the amber winds of the dawn.
cling tightly and with me fly
to the cherished land. watch
dreams bloom when we are gone.

union

do you really want to love me?
I am unworthy so often, self-absorbed
and given to the excess of ego of my
gender and my art. I will never see
a mirror without my demons, barbed
fangs and nails clinging tightly. why
you would want this tortured man
is a puzzle to me. but you give me
love and serenity. a home for this
vagabond heart. an holy band can
bind us, but no tighter than I wish
to be at one with you in an eternal kiss.

tasting the fire

a statement of fact, lacking tact.

I am guilty as charged, my love for you
shall be my undoing, and that of so many
things, but I stand ready to taste the fire.

this passion for you is no act.

others tried that con on you and knew
your disdain and subtle smile. uncanny
your gift to see the true nature of desire.

hold fast

hold fast to me, my love, for I need you.

yes, I said need. few men speak those words
in anything other than calculated lust, true,
but I am not any man. I have spoken shards
of the earthenware heart, spit in rainbow hue
and black and white. the night is memory.
and thus is it cursed by all who care to
ponder its implications. my soul's apogee
is bound to your orbit. thrust into the blue
of the lover's night, I fear no evil, when
you passed the mirror's test and knew
before I did, the names of our children.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventeenth Panther Cycle: **soft reflections**



Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this cycle is the stepping out of my own voice, the write a cycle made up entirely of four-line poems. It was by design, I had noticed a tendency in recent works to go to the excessively verbose, and I was trying to force myself to think in short bursts.

The last two pieces describe actual events from her visit to Virginia, a movie we went to and our farewells at the airport.

It would be the last time I saw her in this life with us on good terms.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

edge

I know only the very nearest edge of my love for you,
for so deep is it that I cannot see the farthest piece.
I know it is buried deep in my heart, like an arrow through
my reality. I shift my focus and live a lover's peace.

summer dreams

my dreams for us are the flavour of the memory
of a summer's day. when the clouds are spun sugar
and the alien blue cheesecake of the sky, for me
holds nothing but hope and warmth and ardor.

shining epitaph

remember me when I am cold and memoried,
songs sung by fading friends and those who never
saw me in life. but I will be remembered.
the inspiration you give me will shine forever.

a kiss

I thirst for your beauty. my tongue is made dry
by your absence, and I would faint. I would taste
deeply of your lips, and be mindful of the reasons why
I dare not wander far. a nectared kiss, well placed.

again

I would lie beside you, once again. to share anew
the warmth and pleasure of our textures and our heat.
in many ways your soul is all the sustenance due
my hungry heart. but it is in your arms I am complete.

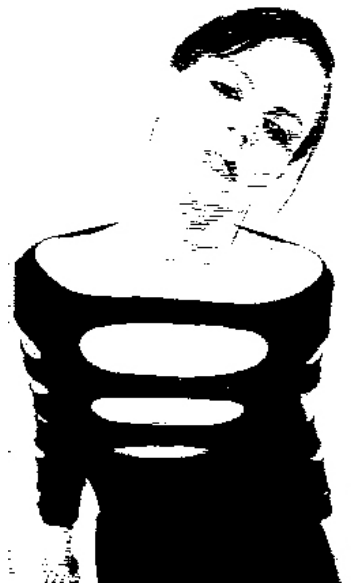
the theatre

we sat in the dark and watched the flickering pictures
tell a tale irrelevant to our lives. but with your hair
against my shoulder, and our fingers meshed to capture
the touch again of flesh denied. a stolen kiss, I dare.

parting at the airport

as we parted, a missed opportunity for a last kiss
still mocking on the air, I considered how much I felt
in watching you walk away. and I wept, knowing I'd miss
your touch and await your return. a tempered sadness welled.

The Eighteenth Panther Cycle:
Unborn Memories, Poetry Written
by our Unborn Children



Did I get slammed for this one?

The self-indulgence of putting words in the mouth of unborn children, children not even conceived.

The sheer insipidity of “the meeting”.

There are times when I think I’m losing what gifts I have as a writer, after reading this one I was sure I was fading in the shadows, as if my sins had torn my powers from me, like a Nazarite shorn of his locks.

I was writing more than I had ever written before in my life, as much as a cycle a day, and I could not vent the poison within me fast enough.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the Meeting

did you ever hear the story of how they met?
yes, a thousand times. how father thought all
the while he was talking to a man. how they set
to their debate on how to spell "Neanderthal".
how they grew to respect and enjoy the minds
of one another, the way they reasoned
even when, in casual conversation, he finds
she is a woman. and his world is overturned.

the Confession

long before I was born, a shy phrase
spoken. almost silent, a footnote
to a long and rambling letter of a praise
for a friend found dear. a dust mote
of affection, expressed and found fecund.
a fertile thought planted in a field
of willing embracement. love beckoned
in a daring slight of memory, healed.

the Kiss

he told me once, about their first kiss.
awkward, and ambush. an elevator I believe,
riding to the sky. a sudden impulse to seize
this instant and violate all plans and scripts
to touch lips with the woman he loved.
and still does.

the Dress

I saw it in the closet. the legends are true.
green and brilliant, short enough to show
those dancer's legs (bold and powerful) to
all who had the courage to stare. I know
she bought it for him, to tempt him to
dance that evening. I'm glad she dared
to court his favour, or you and I, my
sister, would not be alive to share
this story. or to, in our hearts, why
they did not dance that night. they cared
enough to dance, but they did not try
for fear that every eye would be on them
and know their secret. a stolen gem.

the Fight

I heard mother tell the tale (though father does not speak)
of the lost poems. something about a discovery,
brought to light late one night, that smacked of treachery
to his way of thinking and drove him mad. the weak
bonds, still fresh, that bound them together, split
and tore and he had to rip those pages from his heart,
never before or since, taking in his mouth the bit
of madness, and drawing the coach of hell apart
from all. father could not endure the pain and cut
himself off from his words, burning them like leavings
of a refuse pile. smouldering, mouldering to shut
the flue of fading hope. and innocents' grievings.

the Book

words of his expression of love, sculpted with her aid,
bound together to bind them together, a serenade
for the ages. the pages not yet old enough to turn
yellow with age. yet with timeless fire they burn.

the wedding

an army of light, giving their blessing, their seal
on the merging of lovers. destined to give birth
to you and I, my brother. my father and mother, feeling
all that they did and do, had little choice but bring forth
their love in public ceremony. the flowers faded and knelt
before mother's radiance, and father knew joy undenied
in that moment. he called it his birthright, a passion felt
in the corners of heaven. I have seen the pictures and cried.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Nineteenth Panther Cycle: **Seven Wonders**



This one helped, a lot. I refocused, using a thematic structure. Again, thank God for all the “Sevens” in literature, mythology and culture.

“The Statue of Zeus” was a rare flash of humour in my works at this time. At the time I had met the Panther I had been writing an extemporaneous “Top Ten List” column for the Writers Club on AOL, every Sunday Night in their legendary Writers Café, so I was comfortable laughing for a moment.

It took a little research to get beyond the names of the original Seven Wonders, but all in all it was worth it and I learned a few things along the way.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Pyramids of Egypt

Standing even against the blasting sands of time,
which wear away the face of man and his creation,
my love stands, weathered but defiant, a sublime
statement of our patience and dedication.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

The life grows and spreads out, twisting and vining
its way towards the arcing sun, praying to light
and the moisture-rich morning air. Like twining
lover's limbs the stems embrace, supporting bright
blossoms of amber and crimson and iridescent blue
that spread their fragrance like a blushing memory
on an airplane. Knowing everyone can see the true
nature of your love. and marvel at the beauty.

The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus

No crypt of stone or ancient wood shall hold our bones.
It would be sacrilege to our passion, a pile of stones
on a rainbow of glory, strangely out of place, defacing
our faith in the afterlife. A memory's disgracing.

The Temple of Artemis

I burn the offering in the brazier, as the priest has shown,
to summon the image of love in the eyes of the goddess
of the feral creatures and the hunt. For I have long known
that my destiny is with a jungle cat, and to bless
this union, I will seek the elder communion, that which
tells the myths of memories faded, jaded and serenaded
by bards and skalds. I will hold my arrows and bewitch
this cunning beast into my arms. a passion divinely fated.

The Colossus of Rhodes

epic and silent. our passion shall stand longer
than the Colossus, in muscled articulation stronger
than that construct of the image of Apollo, fallen
now with the movement of the earth. no sullen
set of chiseled jaw shall communicate our desire,
but the immortality of words spoken in lovefire.

The Statue of Zeus by Phidias at Olympia

I am glad we do not live in the time of the ancient Gods,
for Zeus was known for his knack for spying the most
beautiful and comely of women, and I would not like to
have to go toe to toe with the King of the Gods, as he
would, undoubtedly, kick my ass from here to kingdom
come, unless the other Gods said "Look, big guy, they
are in love...can't you cut him some slack?", and then
the ambrosia would almost certainly hit the fan.

The Pharos at Alexandria

I crave immortality for our love. in the flesh, yes,
through our children, but also through the light
that radiates out from my soul when lost in serene
contemplation of our binding. our sharing. our decision
to care to choose to love. like a piercing incandescence
that cuts the darkness of despair for lovers, bright
and almost a living thing, this photonic link between
the source of my affection and future generations.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twentieth Panther Cycle: **Fragments of Dreams and Memories**



I shook it off, the doubt, for a cycle and dove full in. I recall vividly writing this one, willing myself inward to embrace feelings and impressions that were free-floating in my mind.

“Kisses” is a quite pleasant expression, and has garnered a fair amount of respect from readers.

“When the shoe falls” was taken from a conversation we’d had about my preparing to ask for a divorce. She had expressed that it wouldn’t seem real to her until it happened, that nothing could come true until the wait for the “other shoe to fall” was over.

This upped the pressure to move ahead as quickly as possible with my divorce. Every day she seemed more and more frightened that nothing would happen. I was the quarterback now, and I had the ball (and no, I didn’t use that metaphor in any of the poems).

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the day is long

the day is long without your voice
to soothe my mind and let me know
that your love is not some illusion
I summoned to make my life of worth.

to love you is my best and sweetest choice,
despite all the obstacles over which I must go
to dispel the pain and the nervewrack confusion
that signals life and love and rebirth.

kisses

how soft your lips, as they slide into mine,
sharing your passion, like a consummate wine
decanted for my joy and in expression of warm
and willing fantasies, as I embrace your form.

honey eyes

I see the gold in your soul
deep behind those honey eyes
that were, on first glance,
a sweet and bright surprise...
having expected a dark
and soulful countenance.
soulful you are, and sweet.
so sweet, fire in every glance.

the merging flames

I hold your clenched hand,
not drawn in anger, but
consuming passion, and feel
the fire in your veins...it
leaps in jets of holy violet
and arcane crimson and
ignites my soul...driving
me mad and mindless. I bless
your love and share my
fire, my desire, as well.

the walk

a long and leisurely pace sometimes.
at other times, a brisk and ragged run.
but together, whenever and wherever
possible. our lives, in rain or sun.

when the shoe falls

we have waited for this moment, evidence
of commitment, proof of the strength
of the fire that burns me daily with its
intensity and incandescence. we chanced
so much in loving. and, at length,
we are rewarded with an opportunity which
we dare not waste. our dreams advanced.

I fear

I fear nothing in this life more than losing
your love. I would live if that were the case,
but it would erase so many dreams of taking
this fine romance all the way to the embrace
of the grave and beyond. I would not falter
in this path, I would love and dream and dare
to kiss your soul. nothing shall, this need, alter
within me. unless you choose not to be there.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twenty-first Panther Cycle:

Flowers



This is actually one of my favourite cycles. The images are so intimate to me, even dating back to my mother's snapdragons when I was a child, that it helped expand my vision of time and relax me. I do not know what I would have done without this set of poems to soothe me.

The penetrating rose makes a re-appearance here, as does my perhaps too orthographic explanation of why I love jasmine tea so much (it tastes like a woman) and the aforementioned snapdragons.

It would not be until the cycle known as "Cassiopeia's Garden" that I would enjoy the flowers so much again in my writings.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the rose

I remember that night
a thousand lifetimes ago
when we lay, joined by the light
of our passions, the penetrating rose
serving as bridge and conduit
for our hungers. our needs.
our open and honest love through it
feeding our memory. planting seeds
of revelation and obscurement
of issues we did not wish to embrace.
the petals, their colour and scent
intoxicating us. a singular vase.

dandelions

some would call them weeds,
but seeing our children tickled
by the explosion of windborne
paratroopers, I call them flowers
of the highest order. for if we
call it beautiful, and know in
our hearts how they bring joy,
how can anyone else's attitude
bend us to the frown of society?

the orchid

I lay in fields of roses, their thorns
binding me, grinding me to the dust
of my days. and the immortal dream
of orchids returns to me. your face.

your face lingers, in upturned eyes,
dancing on the wind like the scent
of the orchids. exotic and sensuous,
real and rich and ripe and wondrous.

wondrous. so is your love and mine
returned a thousandfold. no game
is this, I do not take the harvest
of your heart so lightly as you may think.

you may think I understand your love
in ways I do not, for I am mortal,
and as I am oft befuddled by the
simple beauty of the orchid in my hand.

honeysuckle

perfume on wind of change.
sudden and unexpected
like honeysuckle suddenly
made apparent. projected
fragrance on an holy wind.

I do not pick the blossoms,
but let the fragrance live
on the wind and wait for them
to drop into my hand to give
themselves in their own time.

jasmine

I drink my tea with jasmine
petals in it, so that I may drink
the rich liqueur of them. men
may argue the merits, you may think
what you will of this taste.
but it contents me and brings thought
me of you. I would not waste
your memory. fragrant and hot.

crocus

first life. first light.
the thaw of the soul.
the rebirth, the goal
of all creation. bright.

the snapdragons

my mother had a garden in which she planted many things.
but most withered and died, except the snapdragons, despite
our best efforts (it some times seemed) to engage in floral
genocide while showing our friends how the jaws worked.

ignorance of beauty is not the crime, lack of respect brings
the guilt. we must turn our thoughts inward. the distant night
where we lay, in pledged communion, is old bones. but for all
it's distance, it is real in the garden of time. and respected.

The Twenty-Second Panther Cycle: **winds of change**



“Feral hearts sing songs of victory” (from the final poem of this cycle) is a line that has been used in more than one review of my work. I have never quite fathomed why, aside from the obvious strength of the image.

This is another thematic cycle, but one where I experiment with ascendancy, or the building of a them...the strength of the winds get more and more intense and we get further into the cycle (I later do this with fire, and I believe there are other cycles of similar build).

Emotionally, this cycle is all over the map...one of several written during this phase in our relationship, it reflects my own internal turmoil as well as the hot and cool communications I was getting from my lover. Guilt was destroying her, at this point, so much that I should have already seen the inevitable shattering of our relationship by it, but I was too lost in my own pain, like a blind man trying desperately to fight his way through the choking smoke in the burning house he is in.

Not sure of where to go or what to do, but knowing that standing in place was certain disaster.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

calm

in my most placid moments
I look inside my soul and see
you there. living and giving me
life in all its currency spent
in gambles and offerings
made to the gods of chance.
a sweet and simple dance
with all the hope it brings.

gentle breeze

just enough to stir my hair,
like your hand across the table.
soft and meaningful, a cable
into my heart, communicating care.

stiff breeze

whipping across my consciousness, the wind
snaps the banners on the towers of my keep
in sharp, rhythm actions. your face upon them,
they seize my attention with every crisp sound
and pound my loving mind with trebuchet round
after round after round of all you mean, column
of light and fire. you illumine my shattered sleep
and grant me a pure grace when I have sinned.

gale

howling outside.
don't let it in. hungry
to blister you with cold
and angry rain. like
lovers you forgot
the day after.

cyclone

turbulent and coherent,
like my soul impassioned
with your burnt honey eyes
and dancer's thighs.

I twist my passion
into a feral knot, hot
and corrosive. explosive
and expressive.

like a freight train
of ennobling pain
twisting, blistering alone
into a lover's cyclone.

Hurricane

in the eye of this storm
I wait for you. hoping against hope
that the rope that ties me to this tree
of life is strong enough, long enough
to keep me here when the winds return.

and I will wait. as long as I can.
for I know that riding out this tempest
without you is bitter victory. and I do
not wish to drink the cup of defeat, today.

soulwind

no leaf is stirred.
none. the dark
serenity is total
and focused.

you have tapped
into the sonic boom
of my heart in moments
captured in your world.

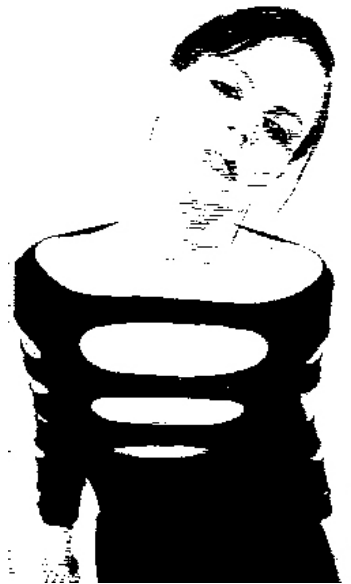
I have seen our future
in the golds of a simple
sky, held transfixed by
a prophetic constellation.

and when it roars, it
is deafening to all
but your voice. my choice
is made. and I will fly.

my wings are new,
but built from an ancient
design left ravaged on a
distant hill in fear and pain.

and I will not return.
never. to this graveyard
of my immortal soul. feral
hearts sing songs of victory.

The Twenty-third Panther Cycle: **Constellations**



This cycle was originally conceived as just another thematic cycle, poems linked via a common theme...and so it remained.

Despite my fondness for things astronomical, and my particular identification for the constellation of Orion, I just didn't have the gas to truly make this a standout cycle. I even went so low as to make "Pisces" merely a retelling of a classic joke.

This was a strange time, where I would not hear from the Panther for days on end, so intense was her withdrawal under the stress of our plans. This left we alone, rudderless and trying to fill my time and cycles any way I could, resulting in the occasional underperforming cycle such as this.

That's not to say that none of the poems are worthy of praise, I was just not happy with the finished feel.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Orion

Huntsman. I am.
Predator for need
and want and nature.
Not sport. I court
your favour not for
the joy of conquest
or to test your resolve
and my charm. But I arm
myself with true affection
and seek the sustenance
of your smile. And touch.

Ursa Major

The bear in the sky points the way
for millennia of lost voyagers, blown
off course by tricks of nature
and judgement lost in the mists
of a dawning awareness of truth.

So I set my course by the bear
and steer for the Panther's lair,
fully aware of the shoals and currents.
But resolute and willing to speak
infinite truths and follow destiny.

Hydra

love is like a Hydra.
if it is truly that mythic beast,
mere decapitation will not suffice
to bring it down. the magic released
will sprout two heads for one, slice
upon slice merely empowers it.
emboldens it. motivates the monster
that hides in the open. fate showers it
with power beyond your ken. capture
it? are you mad? do not play with that
which could consume you without thought.
give love its way and at least its flatline
power, undisturbed, leaves you uncaught.
love is like a Hydra.

Cygnus

the Swan ponders in desperation.
hesitation leads to earthward
plummet from the summit of flight.
and yet, he sings his song if long
denied his nature and his truth,
proof enough of his nobility, if
only held in a nature unchosen.

Leo

the proud beast, released
by the dance of the decades
to predate among the common
creatures of this life. priest
of the last rites, playing charades
of forgiveness for human
failings. roaring defiance
in the face of the storm
and seeking out the validation
of his heart and soul. penance
torn, born from the cloth made warm
by its owner's annihilation.

Pisces

I bait my hook with poetry, like in the joke
where the old sage told his friends, as he spoke
in a mouthful mumble, "my secret to relate
in this regards, is the warming of your bait."

Cassiopeia

the darkness of your myth will live in soulful eyes
reflecting proud lineage and a heritage of passion.
carry yourself proudly, my child, and know that wise
men and women do not mock the gods of creation
without a champion at hand. and I stand ready,
until Perseus makes his entrance in the third act,
to fill that role, as is my purpose and intent. steady
to the purpose of your conception against reasons packed.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twenty-fourth Panther Cycle: **Inevitability**



I remember what spawned this return to the ardent, a phone call.

She was panicked, frightened, convinced that nothing was going to work out and that all we had been through was going to be for nothing, that we would not stick, so I quickly wrote this cycle about how inevitable our love was, how powerful it was.

I found myself, on more than one occasion, hammering home this message to reassure her. It was about this time she began asking her to reassure her that I was not leaving my wife and kids “for her”.

I understand the psychology behind it, but I also felt it was terribly unfair of her to make me say something to soothe her that we both knew was a lie. My marriage had problems, serious problems, but this divorce was being planned, executed and contained under the duress of trying to get us together for the third act (you know, the “happily ever after” and the curtain call).

I should have realized what that desperation meant at the time, but I had already streamlined my psyche into siege mode and had made the offer to end all offers to get out of my marriage: Everything, and then some.

I guess, in some ways, the name of this cycle cuts in more than one direction.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

I am not God

I am not God. I lack the omniscience and omnipotence
required to make certain that all ends well for all concerned,
and I hold my faith in reasons often mocked and overturned
by those who do not see my soul and all its intricacies.
I cannot cure this mesalliance as one would a disease,
giving medicines of annihilation and viral poisons chance
to work their arcane detriment on the innocents. time grants
clarity to the seekers of truth, and all we can do is build
on our feeble knowledge culled from the pain that filled
us yesterday. I am with you, my love, forever hence.

I heard your voice

reflecting your soul, I caught the tone in your voice,
full of apprehension and fear. and love.
do not be dismayed, I am here. I could no sooner
sell my soul for riddles than turn my back
on your peace and passion. your patience brings me pride.
I know that you want what I want and need and call
to God to bless, in spite of all my failings.
love, just once. an honest love without illusions.
without the artifice of codependency and weakness.

bigger pockets

how can you love so much? my pockets are not big enough
to hold all that you manifest. but as a mother does not love
less her second child, or give only half her heart to a twin,
my capacity to love has blossomed with your coming in.

gentle serenity

I am at peace with my life. I have not sought to bring pain
or suffering to those who are innocent, and always have tried
to speak the truth. I am unworthy of happiness, and love
is not a commodity I have any but a pauper's measure to barter
for. I have spoken openly with God and listened, not in vain.
to the counsel of friends and those wiser than I. I have cried
in both pain and joy. and always given leave to all to prove
their innocence of accusations. and tasted kisses like holy water.

bitter waters

a taste, misplaced. the waste of our hearts.
tart and succulent. we do repent, but not relent
our desires, fires and wires that interface
that place between serenity and divinity, where
we are torn asunder, from under our hells it
tells that paradise is priceless and ours.

your face in my hands

all I ask of life is your face in my hands. to see
those burnt honey eyes reflect my soul as I lase
with coherent passion to the kernel of your essence.

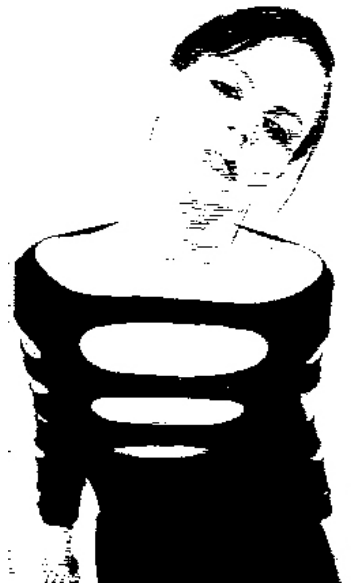
to bear the children of the muse your presence
provides me, to instill a thousand hearts with praise
of the gods of love. soul merged and free.

Panthers and Poets

Panthers and poets. I did not design the tapestries.
but there they are, spread before me in red and gold
and green and a fiery black brought from distant galaxies.
I would ride to them with you, for I knew when bold
I quenched my thirst for holy communion in your kiss
that this is where God meant me to be. this mislaid
destiny. I will find my path, picking among the ruins
of those who can not, will not, dare not bless this parade
of the life artists within us. but it is truth of iron
and living silver, and just this once I will drink wines
the path ordained. the ennobling cutting of my open
heart will bring me down to my knees a thousand times
for crimes imagined, but without your love I well
cannot live. and I will not. even if shackled in Hell.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twenty-fifth Panther Cycle: **tenderness**



A transitional cycle, not so major as just expressive and filling time and air. “Open Secret” has an interesting message. Even though she had taken on a screen name with her totem in it, and we would greet each other in crowded chat rooms where everyone knew about the cycles as “my panther” and “my poet”, some people just didn’t seem to grasp the clues that were there and would pester me for the identity of the Panther.

We were both in pretty bad shape at this time, emotionally, and a goodly part of this and surrounding cycles was taken up with just trying to reassure her that all would be well.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

fractures

Tracing fingertips on the hot soft textures
of your skin. Liquid sin held together softly
by membranes of tissue, an osmotic tap slowly
pulls the essence. Your passion, in colloidal
suspension of lipids and saline. A colloquial
expression, an impression of summoned presence
made manifest in this act. A factor which presents
itself in a single touch. A wounded soul's fractures.

cubes within spheres

spaces we hide our hearts in.
places we place our secrets in.
traces of dreams we believe in.
all bound up in memories of graces
unearned in the manners we were taught.
unturned in our final burial plot.
unyearned for in the quintessential spot
where we are buried with our love unspurned.

solitude

the cold is not all that bad.
sad
maybe.
but not the reaper's twisted grimace.
a two fisted violation
of the consecration.
a forgotten promise and premise.
locked away too cracked to play
with under the Christmas Tree
of forgotten promises.

chameleon

I broker pain for pleasure.
trading my gain for the leisure
of the approval of the masses
instead of what finally passes
for sanity. the granularity
of holograms. focused. the haze
in kaleidoscope greys.
fading now.
shading power
and the illusion
of it, the confusion
of it. a tower
of promises
enforced.

open secret

silence in the shadows, greys perceived by only
by the casters of the runes. everyone knows.
no one shows any interest in the wealth of stealth
storming around the tin sheet stage whisperers.
closed eyes to hide behind. we stumble blindly
over our own diversions....our confusion shows
in the syntax of our conversations. a wealth
of clues left for the blindest of interrogators.

building bridges

sometimes in life we find the ground has shifted
and we have drifted into new territory. lifted
from our sheltering borders, we tense and cry
out with vivid fear and a strong desire to deny
our alienation. but the game is not played
in the plans we made. the sinister charade
of trepidation making icewater of our heat.
those who build bridges to make complete
the transition from yesterday to tomorrow
can make the inevitable into joy, not sorrow.

silver kisses

memory will not fade or tarnish
the memory of your lips, the vanguard
of those kisses you gave me, melting
away all my doubts. shouts of warning
from my conscience's guardians vanish
in the vapors of expressed love. hard
enough to feel your desire. the venting
of restraint in an embrace all-consuming.

The Twenty-sixth Panther Cycle:

Fire



I know, another thematic cycle, and not the best. But each one carries its own baggage, sometimes subtle, sometimes not quite so.

This one includes reference to “the Maglich toroids”. What is a Maglich toroid? Look it up...sometimes we geeks and wonks use the metaphor and allusions that work best as we understand the universe, forgetting our audience may not be quite so “clued in” on some of what we say.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Spark

flint. steel. dissimilar hard material.
struck. struck. struck. for the single bit
of fireseed. some wasted. some tasted
by the kindling and fanned into ethereal
ghost dances. and thus the night is split.

Taper

flickering light. illuminating a safe and small
circle of comfort. we carry the light, high and proud,
on the end of a single wax spire. the fire tall
against the crouched shadows of our fears. loud
against the photic silence of the night. feral eyes
reflect it back to us, and we see our predators
through the mirrors over their souls. no surprise
tonight, hungry waves to crash upon our waiting shores.

Flame

within my soul, your love is a flame,
dancing on black panther coals I name
for your totem. do not fear this fire
for it is fueled by a deepening desire
to see our love sacred and manifest
to stand the obstacles and fully test
our resolve and spirituality. burning
with an unquenched heat, and turning
the twigs of doubt to ashen powder
in the face of our passion's power.

Blaze

There are times when tempers flare
and the air about us erupts with gouts
of Promethean fury. Surely we care
enough for one another that the doubts
we wave as signal torches as we stand
in agonized unity will be remembered
as gained insight and not the twisted hand
of sinister sacrifice to be immolated.

Conflagration

Burning down an infinite row of bridges sold
to ford the streams on a road to nowhere where
I really wanted to go. But the day was cold
and I was weary and lonely and someone there
was needed to carry the basket. And now I am told
that to return to who I am from whence I fare
I must lose the love of all I care for and hold
dear. And I must lay to torch to all who care
for me to achieve all that I was forged to be.
Then hand me the torches and let me be free.

Nuclear Inferno

You can never reach breakeven, they say,
the fires will fall away before you get
the power to a level required for fusion.
But the secret is not in the converging
lasers or the Maglich toroids, but the fuel.

Nothing achieves the flashpoint if the way
you seek the fire is in putting in sweat
for the flaws in the hydrogen cores. When
you find the signature spectrum emerging
from the purest tritium, the reaction will rule.

the Fires of Love

I didn't come this way on purpose. But here
I have to admit I am frighteningly comfortable.
We fit. If God carved me a merging mate, surely
he gave her soulful burnt honey eyes and a feral
panther's dance. A simple stance from chance
revealed me in want of this fractured fragment
of my spirit's hologram to dispel the haze
of confusion. If arriving late to the banquet
thrown in my honor is sin, then I am guilty.
Let the fires be lit and the flames point
the way, let every woman or man have a right
to their panther. Let the dreams be illuminated
with the fated touch of lovers cut of single
cloth but obscured by fate or folly long past.
Stand on the parapets of the keep and watch
the firewinds of love sweep the valley free
of the debris of sad night songs. Strong
is the power of love. Made in the image of
God, we seek the divine spark that lights the
taper, the taper of hope that catches the flame
to set the blazing hearts to burn as they race
towards conflagration. And, when the light
is made coherent in the poets dreams and
themes, and the fuel is pure, the fusion
is achieved and we build to the fire of love.

The Twenty-seventh Panther Cycle: **the Nature of Love**



The nature of love. I was seeking, in this cycle, to speak to the very essence of what I thought was drawing us together, to ennoble the affair in such a way as to reassure and elevate her above her doubts and the criticisms others were leveling against her.

She was catching a great deal of flack from those who suspected or knew about us, it seemed everyone was egging me on, excited by my writings, but condemning her for being a “home wrecker”.

A little hypocritical, I should say. But, in our own ways, we were in the same bind.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

honesty

the nature of love is honest.
for there is little room for
the twists and turns of lies
in the corridors of a heart
made earnest in the vested
dreams and vessels that pour
out our hearts in follies wise
and souls no longer apart.

patience

the nature of love is patient.
you must
take time
to build
the case
and place
your faith
in God
that all
will be
fulfilled
in time.

tenderness

the nature of love is tender.
you must respect the surrender
of the barriers and acknowledge
the vulnerability. you must pledge
before God and your beloved to give
over yourself in gentleness and live
to share the dark serenities as well
as the quiet moments of that tell
you that words will not suffice
to mend this suffering. the price
of love is restraint as oft as action.
in all ways seek your love's protection.

passion

the nature of love is passionate.
warmth given away to heat that burns
you up and down. and through to the seed
of your being, fleeing sanity to sate
our darkest desires in the fire that churns
our flesh into a tsunami of released need.

spirituality

the nature of love is spiritual.
there is no way in science to measure
the force that binds two souls in sweet
resonance. regardless of your final
views on theology, the exquisite treasure
of twinning hearts to be complete
begs the question of divine intervention.

trust

the nature of love is trusting.
hard this is, for the crusting
of the heart over the years
we spend casting our tears
into the living sea of dreams
can make us cautious. it seems
that we so fear to be made
the fool we often parade
around in paranoiac rage.
inventing our own cage.

eternal

the nature of love is eternal.
it does not fade in the infernal
furnaces of age and death, or dry
up in any season. no matter why
we may be unable to hold fast
to our dreams, the love will last
as long as there is a measure
of time to record this treasure.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twenty-eighth Panther Cycle:

Gems



A small offering of precious stones, this thematic cycle. I liked selecting the stones to evolve the works from, then letting myself free associate until the words came to me.

I've never been one who makes the distinction diamonds = love (let's face it, that's a marketing move that people with a hell of a lot more money than I will ever have use to make more money) but gemstones are beautiful and can invoke different moods and thoughts.

Note the reference to the dress in "Emerald".

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Diamonds

the facets are cut, reflecting and refracting
the light of our shared experience, distracting
us from pain and enhancing our dreams tonight.
pure and perfect, first water and blue-white.

Alexandrite

In the light of day we are more than friends,
but express it so subtly in the play of our eyes,
our gestures, unwasted touches of subtle
delicacy and passion. but when day ends
and the darkness falls, we stalk the prize
of ecstasy in wild and passionate battle.

Ruby

crimson. the pure coherent light
of a laser. cutting with fire and bright
focus. a hungry kiss of lips stimulating
more than mere photons, simulating
our merging souls in bright and clear
expression of our radiant hunger here.

Tigereye

you are watching me. you would deny it
but I see the subtle movements in the slit
of dark intersecting the burnt honey stone
set in your soul, cutting to the bone
as you calculate the effort required to
make prey of this creature. but you
didn't know that I was, as well, hunting
you. hungry. needing. and wanting.

Sapphire

if my heart was as true as a sapphire
blue stone, emblem of fidelity, I would
not, could not feel more attached to you.
I love you, and want only your company.
no stone is there I would rather openly
set in the diadem of your soul than new
pledged love and eternal passion. blood
shall stay blue in veins merged in fire.

Onyx

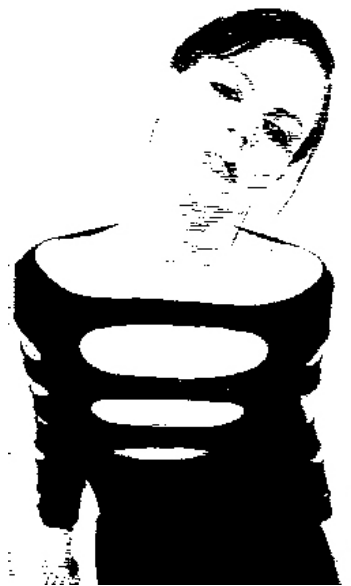
black is my heart when in dark serenities,
where I give myself over to the despair
of my darkest demons. but I cut from these
times a precious ornament for you to wear.

Emerald

like that dress of legend. I see you in it
(when my fantasies are clothed), lovely
and elegant. legs for days and the sweet
beauty you possess focused by the way
your eyes catch the green fire. my desire
was held at bay, there with everyone around,
but I was taken with your charms and proud
that every man took at least a moment to steal
a lupine glance at you. and wanting to dance
with you. as I would, later. with the
emerald cloth set aside, but in my heart.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Twenty-ninth Panther Cycle: **in the words of the Ancients**



I have on my desk a thesaurus that, in one of its many appendices, has hundreds of foreign language quotes.

To create this cycle, I paged through, looking for phrases that caught my eye, caught my fancy, then let the words come forth. I enjoyed the exercise, immensely, and some of the works in this cycle are very well done and evocative.

What do these phrases mean? Look them up!

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Aere perennius

words do not erode or corrode.
they lay the foundation for thought
and heart and that part of our soul
reserved for the truth and the most
beautiful of our illusions. the cold
metal of our daily shells will rot
away with time and tempest. sole
heir to tomorrow will be dreams unlost.

sunt lacrimae rerum

everyday need not be daffodils in springtime.
joy sometimes must make way for the trampling
feet of the winter of our hearts, the lovecrime
and the paralyzing cold of fear eventually filling
our hearts with the measure of pain we need
to fully appreciate those mountaintop visitations
when the tears are evaporated by the wind. freed
of our complacency, we better grasp the transfigurations.

invita Minerva

by sheer coherent emotion, built on the sands
of madness, I have found the colour of music
and sung the songs of the rainbow. taking stands
against the dreams of the damned is a tragic
path to lifelong suffering, but with the balm
of your eloquent kisses I will triumph, someday.
for I shall drag the chaos from the hungry calm
and hurl the die of honest passion into play.

dum vivimus, vivamus

like light, like life.
the sugarknife
cuts back the strife
and to the bone
we stand alone,
our enemies shone
the way of pain.
the lovers' chain
the keeps us sane.

hinc illae lacrimae

I have never wanted to see you cry.
it cuts deeply and with jagged, ragged
rends to my heart. cold and salty air
on the open wounds that I forced
with my arrogance and insecurity.
I do not deny your pain, rather
I magnify it within me. forgive me
if I am wounded by my self-imposed
exile, my self-inflicted wounds
born of the knowledge of unthought
words I have spoken to you

omnia vincit amor

what higher principle is there than truth in the face
of love? driven to the depths of an immolating despair
and the heights of ecstasy, shall we allow disgrace
to be our paramour? no. we must take the dare
in the face of all mediocrity, fear and self-doubt
to make a challenge to the minions of mediocrity
and raise our hearts and passions. to boldly shout
our amotations as we dare to claim our victory.

Satis verborum

the poet does not have a lock on truth
or expression of same. there is a form
of communication that passes between
us when we embrace, comforting and warm,
that speaks volumes of eloquent sooth
I cannot translate with mere words. filled
of joy and peace and hunger, I have seen
it spoken in your eyes. Ambrosia unspilled.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirtieth Panther Cycle: **Aspects of the Panther**



A sincere attempt to capture some of the aspects that I saw in her (whether I really saw them or projected them I leave to future biographers) by expanding on them.

I believe that everyone has both bad and good in them, and that we are all so multifaceted that it is not difficult to focus on those aspects we admire or find attractive, in those we care for.

The Panther was and is, not doubt still, a gifted poet, and the piece in this cycle entitled “Poetry” makes point of this, coming from several conversations when she expressed doubts about the quality of her works.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

creativity

her mind is a marvel to me.
wheels within wheels within
strange four-dimensional spheres
that leave a trail that disappears
and is reborn from whim. in
the essence of creativity.

beauty

speechless. I did not expect one
so intelligent and wise to flood my eyes
with such shimmering sensuality. reality
danced that night, as I absorbed the concept
of an angel made incarnate. the state
of my soul turned inside out and back
to watched you walk away. then back
for a first kiss. and I melted into you.

wisdom

you have this gift, annoying on occasion,
to look inside a problem and find the one
hidden truth, the key to the conundrum
that has eluded me. greater than the sum
of your experience, there is a divine
spark alive within you. spiritshine.

sensuality

you stir within me the animal. the primitive
creature of the hungry id, to bid you surrender
your flesh to the alembic fires that would give
me over into you. ambrosian eyes that tender
the currency of love in a coin I gladly take
and invest in the future, a thousand ways worth
more than anything I have to barter. I slake
my thirst in the geysers of your passion's birth.

sensitivity

you see my heart. and it matters to you whether
I am happy or sad. and beyond this, I have heard
you cry over another's misfortune. you will never
seek the harm of another person, and have stirred
your own life on more than one occasion to make
room for the troubles of someone who needs your
tender consideration. like me, a stray you take
in and heal, now resting in the arms of the Panther.

Poetry

you have the muse.
oh, sometimes you doubt it,
but when the coffee house
patrons stop stirring their
overpriced
decaf
to catch the turn
of a phrase you constructed
and brought to me like a
child
showing off a
handmade kite,
you must know
better. I have
learned from you
and your work
stands on
its own pentameters.

resonance

you know my heart.
you have seen it and merged with it
and I suspect, were born a part of my karma,
like my poetry and my soul.
and as such, it would be a sin to
ignore this half of my essence.
this answer to my life's riddle.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirty-first Panther Cycle: **Virtues of the Panther**



When associates want to beat up on me for the Panther Cycles, this is the one they usually turn to. While it is admirable to embrace the virtues of someone you are in love with, in some cases in this cycle (and I won't go into that) I was obviously not walking with eyes wide open and actually seemed to be describing someone else.

That "someone" I have come to regard as the abstraction of the perfect muse, the perfect woman, reflected in many of my works that have been thought to be about a particular muses or muses.

I call her "Abstra".

Nevertheless, much of what is in this cycle had its seed in my relationship with the Panther and I will state that I said it, I meant it at the time, and that's my story.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Justice

there are reasons to wrath, we all
know them, or most of them at least.
within us all rages the beast
of reactivity. the call
to battle before we have found
the foe. my love has already
been given ample cause to see
me at my worst, but gives me ground
to speak my piece and in this way
spares me the prejudice of pain
left by others. she parts the cold rain
and kisses honest tears away.

Fortitude

courage in the face of opposition,
the ability to bear a cross with grace
and dignity. the nobility of the iron,
flexing only enough to, in the face
of pain and misfortune, stay in play
to win another battle. fighting back
against the rabid rabble to stay
a regal beast against the fleas' attack.

Prudence

What jungle cat
cannot
creep quietly
up to its
prey.
Then tag it with
claws
like cupid's arrows.
Then playfully
dance away?

Temperance

Life is a feast, but this beast
does not gorge herself, lest
she be sluggish when the wish
for new prey is manifest.

Faith

I have seen the Panther praying in the grass.
Her every sense attuned to the passage of God
in the wind. her spirit dancing as her sweet
serenity radiates her awareness, placid and acute.

The open sky is like a chapel's arch at Mass,
fitting tribute to the soul and its creator. Odd
that mortals should seek truth in artifice, eat
scraps and leavings when the trees are full of fruit.

Hope

when there was nothing left to resurrect,
she stood beside me. this feral huntress
that even best friends had warned me back
from daring to ally myself with did impress
me with her vision. and when I was cracked
and bleeding from a thousand spiritfalls
she lifted me up with her words and tacked
the pieces back together, to heal the walls
within me. she is not immune to despair,
but finds her strength when it is needful
to lift a friend, however ephemeral. rare
is a bird with wings so grand and beautiful.

Love

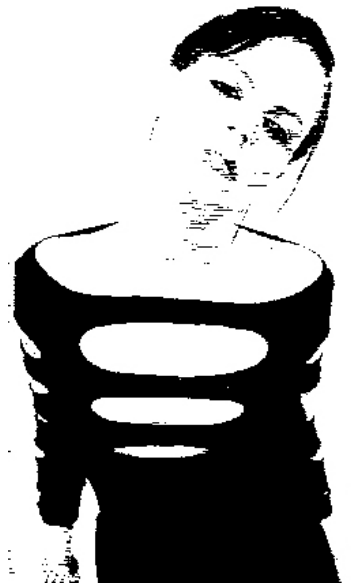
I have heard this word in a thousand voices.
but so often with so little so that it seems
almost a blasphemy before fair Aphrodite.

When my love speaks it, it carries the choices
she has made to be by my side. it holds dreams
that once were stillborn. a prayer to the almighty.

And passion in rainbow colours that is twice as
bright as my grandest fire. A poets best themes
are woven of such inspiration and destiny.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirty-second Panther Cycle: **musings of a troubled heart**



Originally I thought the “troubled heart” from this cycle was hers, as in the timeline this was during the period of time when she was pulling away for the first time, suddenly emotionally distant (then, suddenly, rushing back).

In part this was an attempt to reassure her of our solidarity. The problem was, even I was showing the signs of the stress, the guilt of my impending divorce pounding on me from moment to moment.

In many ways, this was an attempt to reassure me, to rise above the day to day blistering I was enduring from those around me who thought I’d lost my mind. I was, in my mind’s eye, a phoenix, self-immolating in order to survive the next turn of the cards of fate.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

labors of love

for we have pulled
down
the skies and made them our own,
repenting for sins we cannot atone
in complete modesty,
for we find our motives
pure, if puzzling.
dragon nuzzling
panther. an answer
to a riddle unasked
and made a task
worthy of Heracles.
nor for a mortal man,
but I am game
and the sad shame
of cowardice
is not for me
at any price.

divine wind

we can tell. we know
what the hell. we go
to the top. our fates
kill this crop. the hates
planted here. by those
held in fear. we chose
poorly once. but time
sheds the light. our crime
magnified. our right
to share love. and light.

darwinian hearts

passions pressed against the wall
like lovers too anxious to wait for gravity
to consummate their union. the fall
of more than barriers of fabric, energy
modulating to match the resonant
frequencies of a soulmate. kisses cut
from ice sculptures born of our arrogant
illusions of love. scrimshaw intricate
and illegal, poachers in the heart preserves
posted long ago. but the honest instinct
to love is immortal, and our patience swerves
into the stream of life to prove us not extinct.

massage

my hands, with strength and tenderness,
melt into your shoulders and draw slowly
the toxic stress from you. a single kiss
to the nape of your neck and this lowly
vagabond heart resumes his rhythmic
rub. soft and warm is your neck, a part
of you so lovely, made warmer by methodic
strokes of my palms, fingers and heart.

coldfire

zero based emotions.
we measure our hearts
from the intersection
of past and present.
dreams unpleasant
not waking us
but taking us
past the invocation
of memories. we start
the fire in void devotions.

the philosophy of lovers

held in the superstring web of time and space

yesterday was an illusion,
aside from evidentiary resonances
and remnants. tomorrow is conceived
from the seeds we plant today, one
by one by one. the savage dances
of past mistakes relented and relieved.

hard wire

coming through the new machine.
a modem's wail like a banshee's keen.
dreams now spun in words on white.
a cold connection in the night.

fire, subjugating now our will,
wine that flows where glasses spill
more than their contents. secrets
shared in private pirouettes.

images absorbed in coated glass
to illuminate with faultless class
our thready desires. passion shared.
fates dared. and fragile souls bared.

The Thirty-third Panther Cycle: **images**



Okay, the isolation was getting to me...and I was desperately trying to build, with words and raw emotion, bridges to a coming day and place where I would be absolved of my sins, forgiven my deceptions, and blessed for my steadfast love. Okay, I was delusional. But, fiercely and steadfastly so.

In this cycle I sought to weave imagery, never my strongest suit as a poet, but the effort was creditable.

Some were of things that had been and I wished to recapture, some were things that had yet to be, but she had sworn to me, or I to her.

And all fell to the coming winds.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

I.

and when in words once judged absurd
we have heard
our dreams unbound,
we find our paths will make us laugh
in sad wrath
of love unsound.

the dreams now make what we would take
for the sake
of our sweet prize
inconsistent, if we repent
and relent
our love's disguise.

II.

crimson amber, the tears of a Nemicorn,
lubricant for the whetstones on which edges
are honed, sins atoned in penance stillborn
in the cauldrons of passion. broken pledges
like broken wings of a winddragon. the skies
remain, but the rain of the sticky red tears
leaves an immutable monument that pries
away the dark capstone entombing your fears.

III.

a game of shame and magic.
a hidden destiny.
a fruit both sweet and tragic
plucked from a fabled tree.

eyes now filled with the vision.
a recognizing stare.
the lovers dream a prison
both base and debonair.

III.

we challenge. and we dare not blink
in the face of the fire, in the name of the link
that combines us to one, our sacred task
is to answer the questions most would not ask
for fear of the power of truth to destroy faces
held as more than facade, to fill the places
we keep hollow with ashes of fallen dreams
baked in their fusing fires to silence screams.

V.

there is a subtle message in the comfort of your kiss,
a signal that another man might, to his own loss, miss.
a telling of a story and a spinning of a thread
that dangles and entangles all who, in this one sense, bled
for the reading of the riddles, dark mysteries unthought
in pondering the puzzlewebs in which we all are caught.

VI.

we have been apart so long. a drop in the temporal bucket
next to the times spent wandering past wildernesses,
but still I ache for your embrace. there is a comfort I get
from looking into those eyes, burnt honey and rich fire
flowing like the magma of an intemperate soul. they set
my soul aflame and beg me to act to leap the cold crevasses
of our arctic desert. time marked, nights wasted, a ducat
of wood painted with metallic gold to lure us into blind
and foolish meanderings. but barter enough for Pascal's bet.

VII.

I stood, like a casual bystander caught in some
elegant street drama, and watched you with great
curiosity. Your attention focused, like some true
master of a bygone age as he mixed his hues
and stroked the canvas with an eye towards
expression and immortality. Your hand pressing
the brush with confirmed firmness and the grace
of practice and an artist's soul. Majestic lines
to summon deep emotion and admiration were
invoked and you stared, with the artist's eye
towards perfecting the work. You shot me a
sideways glance to ascertain my level of
delight or apprehension and, seeing my
smile of approval, began the other eyebrow.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirty-fourth Panther Cycle: **a day in my heart**



A gentle cycle, this one, an expression of a serenity. But, it was actually a stretch, a moment between such thoughts where things were looking shaking, trying my best to re-invoke the emotions.

The stress of everything had been very rough on my panther. Rumours were flying around online, rumours that pointed at her, accusations of her breaking up a marriage, much as her own parents' marriage had broken up when she was young. She was ragged, emotionally, and had found a friend, another woman, who was telling her it might be best to cut her losses and dump "the married guy".

But I still believed in the improbable. That's what real Romantiques do.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

play

let's play. sometimes like children,
with an air of joy and discovery.
colours. sounds. scents that wend
their way through our memory
to leave an indelible tracery on
our lives forevermore. or more
like the grownups we pretend
we are, forced by time to shore
our birch bark canoes and stroll
barefoot and open-hearted through
the dark forests of our souls.
the joy of life transcendent and true.

conflicts

to many who observe us
we make no rational sense.
but they have never seen us
hold one another or felt
the electricity that arcs
between us when our eyes
lock
and run together,
drawing us to strike
sparks
like flint and steel.
into the tinder
of immortality
and passion.

wishes

I would, if I could, kiss you right now.
it would be your say as to whether
it would be a gentle brushing of the lips
or a fiery merging in the fire of desire
fanned by our enforced separation,
but I would kiss you. and hold you
for as long as you wish me to.

rain

you love covers me like the slick
of a summer downpour, fresh from
the ocean...the scent of tropical air
engulfing me and transporting me
as the moisture brings a fickle
purity to my form. the storm
awakening me to the day, aware
of all the rainbows only you see.

colour dreams

I did not dream in colour
until you confessed your love.
it was as though a great and
hidden dimension, once obscured,
had burst forth like desert
blossoms after a sudden storm.
and all the world took on the life
radiant in your transfiguration
and blessing to my soul and fate.

in your arms

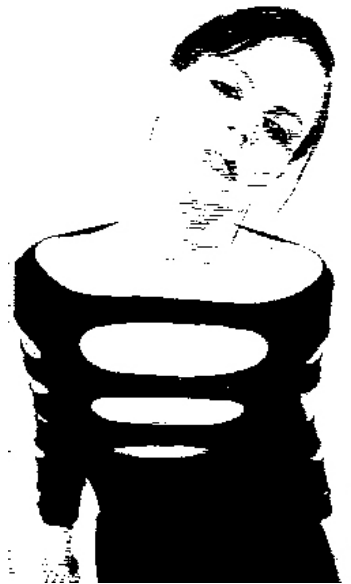
there is no place of greater contentment than in your arms.
no fear can touch me. no sorrow betray me. no darkness
calls to threaten my joy. I suffer not when in your presence.
look. can you not see that it is this bastard time and space
that holds us apart that is the seed and sprout of all misery
we have encountered together? let us sever the bonds of
distance and share breath again. for I miss being in your arms.

huntress

have you, at last, found
what you are searching for?
and, if this is the case,
will you linger and explore
with me the lovely
topography of our fates, blended?
I would ask this humbly,
for you must decide if your hunt is ended.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirty-fifth Panther Cycle: **dancing dreams**



Yet another urgent, urging cycle. A desperate attempt to rekindle the sense of magic. Our conversations were becoming tortured...she was frightened and guilt ridden, I was just frightened, trying so hard to make sure everyone got a happy ending.

Some of my most universally beautiful and loving works may be found here, expressions of resolve and passion and patience. “Jasmine tea”, “in the public square” and life. and the courage to live it” all express an unflagging romanticism that was consuming me as my world flickered and faded around me.

I wasn’t focused on survival, by this time. Most people fall back into survival mode. My first instinct is to get everyone else to the lifeboats. So, here I was, killing myself trying to reassure her and make sure that my children and my wife were taken care of, all the while feeling my flesh peeling away in the flames of my own failures of judgement.

And the dreams just kept dancing.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the wire of dreams

I did not know what tears were until one day
when I felt alone, for you were not there to
raise my spirits and let me spread my wings
on the winds of life. the knife never came
and I am liberated by your honest persistence.
resistance is not futile, even if all you gain
is the nobility of knowing you fought for
principles higher than most can even
believe in or conceive of. the wire of dreams.

in the wrong light

diamonds taste like glass.
if you look at things the wrong
way, they say the wrong things
and wings are useless underwater
except to the stingray. a future
unrealized is a mad vision,
an honorable promise is a prison
if you don't know the way
to taste glass and diamonds.

Spanish guitar

your voice registers to my ears
as a well-played Spanish guitar,
moody and brilliant, an eloquent music
to lift my spirits above the tragic
burn and chafe of this world. far
from the wash of mortal tears.

Jasmine tea

you taste like jasmine tea to me.
warm and rich, full of promise and
a taste that lingers on my tongue
as the exquisite stingers drive me
to aching, arching, exquisite agony.
wanting just another soft sip
from the lip. from the hip.

panther's dance

you dance like a cat on the prowl, your growl
not a threat, but a promise. a hungry kiss
and again you spin, trapping my eyes in curves
cut to split the wind and steal my breath.
grace. and a dangerous face with a smirking
smile that shows passion lurking around
every bend. a friend, yet so much more.
and I try to resist to the core of my being.
but looking inward, I am seeing you there.
waiting. and baiting a trap I am already
held helpless and happy in.

in the public square

as long as I have you and two coins
to rub together, it won't matter whether
or not the world approves, I've got the game.
I've got the name we whisper when no one
else dares to listen, but would love
to hear us say out loud, in plain sight
when the night is long and the shadows
hide the incarnations of the rumours
we laugh about. and cry about. and
even used to lie about to buy a
half measure of privacy for a
private affair in the public square.

life. and the courage to live it.

the radiance of life grows
from your soul, illuminating
my existence and making me
long for the walks on the beach,
sand between my toes. pausing
only to leave sand angels where
we make love in the tidal rim
of the infinite sea, which we
have cast our love upon in
courage and desire.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirty-sixth Panther Cycle: **under pressure**



I finally gave into the pressure, the stress, and wrote of it in this cycle. “Clinging like a mad dragonfly on the side of a 747” was a pretty accurate image to my life at that point.

I was resolute, but resolve in the face of fractured judgement is not a virtue. I was trying to be strong enough for everyone else, and everyone else was just telling me to lay down and give up.

I went so far to ask the Panther if she wanted out. She asked me to tell her that she was not the cause of my divorce. She begged me to tell her that. She said she couldn’t live with the guilt.

So, I lied. I told her that she wasn’t the cause. She knew it was a lie. I knew it was a lie. But, as a small child who is told a fairy tale explanation of something horrible happening before their eyes, she was consoled.

And I was more alone than ever.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

mad wheels

in the silence, my soul explodes in a fountain
of fire and showers of electric sparks that
ignite the tinder in the box of my vision
of who I am and what I am and where I fit
in your universe. the blessing and the curse
of the poetsoul. to know the essence
of love and life and God, but to reach
with fingers numbed to the cold presence
of mortality so that I can never teach
these truths to those my kismet chose.

draining the muse

lancing the festering emotion
piled deep
and dark.
stressing the soft tissues
it has infected,
unprotected,
for the poet gene
leaves it naked
to its parasites.

destiny

The truth is ennobling. Higher truths than most can grasp, a principle at stake, like Joan of Arc. But no polarizing pontificate will light this pyre, and there will be no bonfire for the marshmallows we began to toast on our passion fire before we hike up our walking boots and keep moving, fate only providing a map. We provide the go.

Avatar

Clinging like a mad dragonfly to the side of a 747 on taxi, I don't really know what will happen when we bank and climb into the skies undreamt. but there is pride that I have held on this long. I show my scars, but I call no quarter, no time.

A rose discarded

it's purpose done, the rose lays cast aside. the dance is finished, and death and decay are inevitable. no more to serve to slide its fragrance between the common day and the infinite night of a never forgotten tryst. a wistful kiss and a song I sing even now as I pen these words. when men recall this era, they will know the sting of never loving with a dream that did burn and will once again, when roses return.

distance and dances

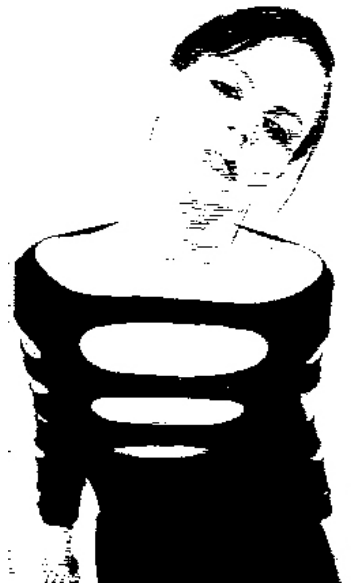
I cannot kiss you goodnight tonight.
I cannot hold you close and tightly
meld my sleeping breath with yours
as we dream together, visions pure
and plutonic. memories we share
in a future life, time that will bear
down on us like a welcome train
carrying us on a honeymoon in Spain.

loving my friend

I cannot imagine not being your friend
forever, your mind is so lively and I
can sit for hours and listen to you speak
of nothing and everything as you bend
the clock with weariness. I would lie
to say I do not love you with a deep
and abiding passion for your absorption
of me like two raindrops merging on
a fresh-waxed car. both friend and lover.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Thirty-seventh Panther Cycle: **meander**



A series of fragments to my view. Trying to fill gaps. Trying to keep dancing, even when the music wasn't playing.

I was allowing myself to bleed to the page. Words tumbled out of me like drops of blood and serum, trying hard to cleanse the wounds. Fragments that might not have otherwise been worth transcribing from heart to mind to page.

That's not to say these are not good. Indeed, they are. But also you can see the nakedness of them, the way the colours have not been blended, but build in thickened lines of pigment and brushstroke texture.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

thirsty waters

I want to feel those precious fingers of you gripping me,
slipping me the secrets of your desire as you enwrap me
in your flesh and drink down the thirsty waters that burn
like an inferno of merging essences, dreams that turn
to the edge of reality, then suck us in to assimilate
one another like a pair of symbiotes when they mate.

the green dress

wow.

I was dazzled and proud,
but could not aloud
tell you what I thought.
too hot. way too hot
were those pictures that
flooded my mind, cats
in chaotic rut
and the emerald
drape that curled
about you like my eyes
in delicious surprise.

pleasures and treasures

I feel you take the helix shared
in passionate coupling and pirouette
my essence with yours, ensnared
and absorbed in sudden and wet
exchange of pleasures and treasures.

a dream

standing. both of us on the same side
of that white picket fence that one time
seemed so far away and wrong. pride
and principle kept us alive until the fine
details of our affections could be cut
into the metal of our souls. I still carry
your heart within me, as you mine, but
it is so merged with me that I barely
can tell where my flesh ends and your
sweet and gentle essence begins. and we
look down and see our handiwork, four
years old and smiling up at you and me.

I fell in love with a friend

old story.

guy meets girl. but because of the medium,
he doesn't know he's a she. and the sum
of their experiences make them into friends.
but this is not where this story ends.

nope. no way.

in time, when the smell of the sea rises
to the late summer winds, he surprises
himself with his own words and discovers
a lurking passion and affection, lovers
destined.

noses

our noses sometimes give us trouble when
we kiss. for me it is because I hate to
break my gaze into your soulful eyes, few
things in this life mesmerize me as being
face to face, flesh to flesh, lip to lip
with the woman I love, sharing breath
and dreams and destinies that death
will not deny me. and forgiving the noses.

glass souls

glass souls break
and we take
the fragments
and glue them
back to seem
together,
but the heat
is required
to fuse them
perfectly.

The Thirty-eighth Panther Cycle: **Pride in the Panther**



A series of metaphorical and allegorical expressions of actual events. Having a drink in New York. Her, telling me about a publication credit, or confessing an infidelity.

Again, I was doing all I could to shore her up. I knew I was locked in on this trajectory, I was not certain of her, and was trying to reassure her, to bolster her confidence and ego.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

at lunch in New York

a memory emerges. three of us at lunch
in a strange restaurant near where we thought
little Italy was. waiting for the waitress
who looked like Olivia Newton-John's older
and less clever sister to bring us the
impossibly fouled up orders. I sat
and watched with perverse pride as
our oblivious friend took every
opportunity to shoot a Siamese cat
look of admiration at you, lost
in your sandwich. he did not know
how much a compliment he paid me
as well. and perhaps would have
felt like our waitress did when you
put on your business face and went
in to straighten things out.

the reading

I wasn't there. damn. nearly a thousand
miles away and having to listen to your
post-mortem. I love that poem, it changed
my life and gave me a new star to pour
my dreams out to. and now you read it
to a room full of strangers and friends.
some I'll never get to see, in that split
instant of understanding, or if it ends
still an enigma to their experiences.
I would have understood. no sign of fear
in your words. and much truth. traces
of genius. I wish I could've been near.

truth

it hurt.
getting my soulteeth pulled
without anesthetic.
but you handled it well,
asking to speak to me directly,
no words typed on a
screen of glass and light.
and you told me, you
could have obscured,
but you recognized
what was at stake.
and you showed me
what you are made of
when the chips are down.
even when they are your chips.

getting through the day

there have been days.
more often than not, my fault.
where the sedentary greys
go black with sadness and halt
the ability to function
in this world. but you have managed
somehow to function,
even with a heart that is bandaged.

casting me out

there have been times you have needed to
cast me out of Elysium, back to Valhalla,
where one of my temperament is more to
the tastes of the gods. I fume and call a
disemboweling of the chicken, and rage
becomes my weapon and words burning
with venom and anguish strike the page
and ricochet into your gentle heart. wings
of glass prove metal in that instant as you
rise away and above until the berserker
fury in me calms and I show you the true
affection you need and deserve from a lover.

the prize

you called and told me of it.
so excited
like a child with an A+
on a really tough spelling test.
you said it was no big deal,
but I could tell what it meant.
someone somewhere had
seen your heart on the page
and felt the truth in your
words and placed a ribbon
of approval for all time
to mark those words
in his or her heart.

dreaming

having been through the stagnating life all mortals
are subject to, the panther has risen from the muck
and groomed herself to the glistening, inky black
coat that is her camouflage and distinction. all
that she is, she point towards the horizon. dreaming
of lives unlived, children unborn, a train ride
across Europe in the company of her proud mate
(who leaves his Viking helmet at home to state
he has retired from war now that so much pride
has been fulfilled). and new horizons are still calling.

The Thirty-ninth Panther Cycle: **Passion and Delight**



I was trying to send her off with a little fire in her. She was heading to a writer's conference (supposedly in the company of her disapproving best friend. I'll never know for sure.) and would be out of touch for a few days.

I was about to travel to Pennsylvania and finally meet, face to face, the Goldenheart. I had to see if my most grand illusions were out of control, I had to meet the one person who had stirred my creative juices as much as had the Panther would affect me the same way.

So, I lit the fire under a cycle largely made up of sexual fantasies we'd shared...and trusted they'd not be wasted on her.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the kiss of life

touching you with all my flesh and feeling the meshing
of our essences. the presence of our love overwhelming
all fear and timidity. the heat making complete hearts
of our twin halves. Aphrodite laughs and is pleased by
the fire in our kiss. I miss this and would taste again.

gentle impalement

softly. slowly. a reverential
taking of me into you. a gentle
merging of lost souls. providential
in our time of love. a sacramental
sharing of pleasure and our eventual
coupling of lives to create a new soulfall.

the spirituality of making love with you

there is something that touches me when we are unified
in the flesh. I cannot describe it, for my words are weak
and I dare not speak in shadows, lest you think me tried
and found wanting as a witness to your inner beauty. speak
for me, my limbs, my mouth, my hands, my sex and pride
will tell you what humility cannot. there is nothing I seek
more holy than your love and our joining to take our side
against the world. within your arms my soul is at its peak.

holding the grain

my fingers play across the fields of dark grain.
witness to the fertility of this field. I would plow
this soil under and plant deeply with summoned pain
the seeds of my surrender into your earth. now
is when I need you most, a toast to the rain
I shall water your field with and wait to see how
well the seed sprouts. and if I need sow, again.

against the wall

I would finish what we started.
you, your back to the wall, your
desire playing across your face
in a moment of pleasant shame
and carnal hunger. I would lift
you up to impale yourself upon
me and feel you buck and glide
your ride upon my penetration.
I would press my lips to yours
and feel your catching breath,
the death of all barriers that
held back the dammed future
we are destined for. feeling
your surrender to my conquest
of your flesh and accepting my
expression of emitted passion
as you smile the panther smile
and give me your soft trilling
purr and giggle of pleasure
consummated. yet not sated.

the flight

you tumble gracefully, fully aware of
the gleam in my eye, my dream of your
body laid open and face down upon the
fabric of the carpets. your breasts
brushing the rough fibers as I split
your thighs with my hands and take
you, from behind....

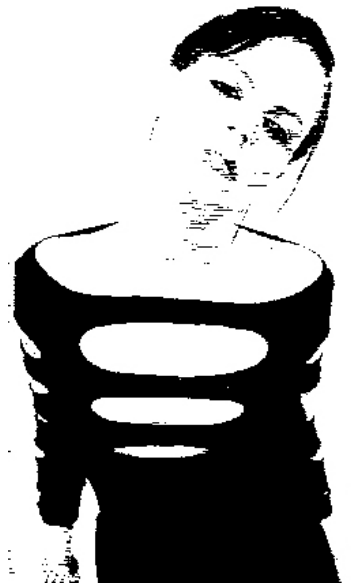
you feel the coarseness of my hair
against your soft buttocks and gasp
with the power of my hunger...the depth
of my thirst to plunge into the well
I have drank my fill of in a thousand
dreams and darkling prayers. I hear
the sounds of my moans and grip the
carpet tight as you feel my final
thrusts into you, bursting through
the mental barriers of reservation
to flood you with the rich perfume
of my shared life. and you feel my
teeth at the back of your neck, mad
like a rutting leopard with its mate.

the contest

my dark kiss against yours?
how delightful. a worthy challenge
to two souls whose fleshs have found
as much joy as our twinned hearts
and souls have. I will drink deeply
every drop of moisture from you,
slowly suckling the very taste of
you until you feel the flow of your
senses into me, while you take your
fill of my warm wine. and, as the hills
crest and the test of endurance grinds on,
I will make you mad with ecstasy and
passion until you feel yourself dance
among the dark stars of an inferno
of pleasure, gripping with tense fingers
and releasing your passion slicked tongue
from its perch to drift away in pleasure.
as I tremble with the last vestiges
of my own consciousness.

The Fortieth Panther Cycle:

Illusions



There is that moment, when the walls fall down and you are so crushed beneath them that you can't breathe.

Just moments before I wrote this cycle, I had been cast out. In a few terse words the Panther had told me it was over, that she couldn't take it all. I was devastated and angry, twisted and desperate.

Dead man writing.

I had already negotiated a separation agreement that would pledge me to eternal poverty. I had lost nearly all my friends (those few who came to me to offer their sympathy were told to support my soon to be ex-wife instead, that she would need their emotional support).

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

As soon as I hung up with her, I wrote this. Then I laid down to sleep and had a tormented dream that broke only when the figure of a small girl appeared in it and reassured me that all would be well. I took it to be Cassiopeia.

When I got up the next morning I asked to be taken to the hospital, where I checked myself in to the psychiatric ward. I know I would never really hurt others or myself, but I recognized that I was exhausted and lost.

labels

we draw upon our hearts to tell us the truths
we dispute with the labels we cannot refute
for they are learned and applied in wisdom
and in pain. stain and rejection, and from
this we provide our own emotional
buttressing. it has been this was from final
call to genesis and fore again. the war lost
in silent strategy made by generals who tossed
out their agenda and left the field feeling
benumbed and broken. pawns left reeling.

as a friend

as a friend I mourn the loss of your love,
whether it ever truly was as I imagined,
or if I merely was a transition to prove
to you that love was possible while the end
of your sadness was held accountable
in words you shared with others, children
left in the celestial pipeline to dangle
in words never meant. the desolation.

faith

and in the end, not even trust.
not even the gentle respect thrust
so hard in those October furnaces.
wings folded and the necklaces
of dreams unconsummated thrown
down to strike the floors of our own
perfidy. the knifeblade handled sword
falls back on its master, the cord
is severed with casual benumbment
and I am set adrift in a flaming firmament.

logic of a panther

you were ever the logical one. seeking validations
for your feelings, trying to apply the shell science
of psychology to the vagaries of the heart. stations
taken, I always knew your deceits when they chanced
to make no sense. and yet, I smiled, for here was one
in such deep and soulful pain and gentle concern that
she needed the time and space to find her way. gone
now is facade, however played. proven but an alleycat.

larger than life

I do not fear being epic.
indeed, my life is built
on the necessity, fate felt
and lonely. I have killed
my soul, and betrayed many
in this game of ascension.
left with pirated questions
and a sad laugh of irony.

hunger

the hunger is not slaked by the dance
of words across my reality. the chance
to live and love betrayed in backroom congress
and mocked in subtle sidesteps. I bless
my God who warned me thus and prepared
me for this. the oracles assured I fared
better than I might have. the hunger
fades not and in other arms shall panther
take her rest while I am left to thirst
on the rocks of a Salt Lake sandbar, cursed
to love with hope and not timidity.
words struck down in aggressive passivity.

moving on

a dilemma unfolds. will loving again
make mockery of what I have felt. I do
not know. for the pain is might and when
I look inside I see the vision of the two
dark panthers, the bloody dove and demon
clutching the mockery of the twinned heart.
I will mourn for a season, but having gone
beyond the Pillars of Hercules, make a new start
and now made wiser by schoolyard politics
make my way to the altar of truth unsemantic.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Forty-first Panther Cycle: **Reweaving the Tapestries**



There is a point to one of the Laws of Thermodynamics. The one that says that nothing is ever created or destroyed, just changed from energy to matter or visa versa.

Within days of the fall, I was back on my feet. The only really rough spot was the first of my three days in the hospital when a nurse walked by with hair just like the Panther's...it was too vivid and bizarre.

I checked myself out of the hospital after making sure in and of myself that I was going to be okay. Within hours of that, I wrote this cycle, and gave myself a new totem: The Bard Dragon. I guess I felt it was about time that I got a fantastic creature for my symbol in my works.

In any case, these poems showed a determination to wade out of the emotional mire. Indeed, it was only a few days after this that the Panther contacted me and asked for a second chance.

And thus began the new cycle that would be the pattern of our relationship for the next year or so...

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

pulse point

her heart is all that beats within me.
and when the pulse points are faint,
I paint my face ashen and withered.
the source of all the greatest joy
receding in the veins of time. many
are my sins, and I am no mortal saint,
but God has blessed me, sadness cured
and hope made manifest for eternity.

BardDragon

wings are not standard equipment on all
creatures of the fantastic realms of life.
the BardDragon must come to understanding
with this, knowing that jungle cats may
only make leaps of faith and not soar on
leather wings. and, for a season, to fulfill
as best he can, oaths made in honest love
and passion, he must fold his wings and rest,
prey to the pickings of the wolves of fear
and the carrion feeders so long avoided.
he shreds the membranes and settles in
for the longest night of his existence.
praying against the darkness of his own
trepidation and insecurity. for nowhere
in this universe will he find another beast
as regal and beautiful, possessed of soul
and voice of dreams flowing in sadness
tempered by love and honest emotion.

avatar

I have seen the avatar.
seen her stand astride my
soul, sharing her love in hopes
and future memory far
beyond my wildest dreams. sky
of gold reflecting the slopes
of her radiant beauty.
invoking my heart's duty.

within the shell

within the spidering cracks
of broken hopes, joy is found
in the rebirth of love drowned
in sorrows and the poisoned jack
of forbidden fruit. now unbound,
dreams may yet rise to confound
the surgeons at Lazarus's grave.
a simple faith, a currency brave.

serenity

and when I am tired.
and uninspired
to live my life beyond
the morning, dawn
holding terrors dreamed
in a tortured scream
into a pillow, I recall
the words so small
they fill the universe
and lift the curse
of fear from my madness.
and I am blessed
by your love. and raised
for the coming days.

unborn children, weeping

having dreamed the dreams, I must honor
the love of future lives and take my ragged
feet again to the paths of silent echoes
as I search in vain for the source of cries
of sadness. no flutterbyes will conjour
a smile from your lips without a snagged
piece of psyche twisted in epic throes
of lost love, yet unsummoned. time denies
so many things, but it is yet further
down this road where I may rest. haggard
hopes and baby kisses. no one knows
as I do. there is nothing that love denies.

the realm of dreams

I am regent in the realm of dreams.
and I will take my throne and rule
with wisdom you have given me. streams
of awakening understanding. cruel
words I have cauterized from my pain,
lashing out in suffering at an innocent
lover, held too far for unity. the chain
was too short to escape and arrogant
self-pity was my sin. but in this realm
I rule. and I shall chart a new helm.

The Forty-second Panther Cycle: **seven roses**



Another thematic cycle. I guess I couldn't ever get enough of these.

While not a full dozen, the seven roses gave me a chance to express various facets of the moment and the vision, from white through red to black.

Yes, I know, there are no true black roses, but I worked briefly in a flower shop in high school and knew of the sprays they used to touch up flowers and foliage. The black rose had been my symbol for years, a symbol of intensity and focus, of beauty even in the darkness.

I was amazed I was still writing, even as I pondered my fate. I had bought my way, literally, out of my first marriage, and eventually, after the Commonwealth of Virginia added their share onto the heap, found myself owing more a month in maintenance and support than I was bringing in.

Homeless, hopeless and loveless, something had to break. And I knew it wasn't going to be me.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

white

a gentle thought. respect and
admiration given and taken. love
shared and nurtured in a season
yet invoked in dreams caught napping
like kittens. eyes closed in youth.
the truth of our admiration set
dancing like gulls running from
the foam of an encroaching sea
of the curious and the furious.

pink

modesty forbids
I speak of kisses
warm and intense. threads
of affections twist
around and bind joy
in a chrysalis
of bashful loveplay.
an encroaching bliss.

yellow

when the fires burn to hot for us to dare,
to care to touch the iron of our cauldron'd brew
of new memories and old prayers we float
on boats in the stream of life, our unity
will be in our kindred interests. we can touch
so much of one another in thought and deed
with need of no invocation of our passions,
and one day reopen the petals to drink nectar
we are saving for a more propitious time.

red

red as the blood in her veins, feeding her soul
the desire, the fire, the entire symphony of emotion
she dances on the beach to. the crimson bowl
that catches the sacrifices she has made in motion
with the jungle winds she cuts in dark control
of her grim and playful pursuit of a new predation.

lavender

a hint of the soft solferino of your lips,
beckoning me in innocent insurrection
against the tides of self control that grips
me not firmly enough to avoid their confection.

blue

mythic.
like a nemicorn
cavorting in a field of blue roses.
legend.
like a dream panther
taking my soul and making poetry.

black

if my propensity
for intensity
drives you away
I understand
for this mortal man
sometimes plays
with an edge dark
with his own stark
visions of an errant
martyrdom. the bloom
must rend this gloom
to grow sweet and radiant.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Forty-third Panther Cycle: **actions of love**



This was the first cycle after the great fall that I really thought showed me back on the track. Not emotionally, as I know what I can endure in that sphere (I'm emotional, but durable) but artistically. I was getting my feet back under me and reaching for eloquence again.

I think the public response to “kisses” was remarkable. A worldwide sigh. Everyone was rooting for me to hang in there, telling me to keep the course and keep the faith, that she was just “confused” and no woman could walk away from all I brought to the table.

Well, maybe I needed to explain things to them more clearly? Or maybe there are just so many people in this world who honestly and totally do believe in love?

I'd like to think that.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

words

more than just the words
spoken in proper order, tone
and timber of voice soft and lofty,
the integrity of what is heard,
the edge we delicately hone
on our blades of trust, freely
wielded and yielded to fill
a lover's heart with a sense
of the ambrosia offered
in the lover's living will
imbued with words in suspense.
awaiting promise raptured.

embrace

lean in my arms and accept
my shelter from your dark moments
and I will allow your shadowdance.
I would not steal your deep romance
with the dreams of sorrow, preventing
not your inspiration. I accept
your emotional integrity. but would
feel you in my arms and share good
warmth and pleasuring pressure
as I fold myself in your essence.
the strength I draw from you lends
me great serenity and subtly bends
the light to halo you as a presence
in the pantheon of dreams of pleasure.

kisses

I miss your kiss
and want it back.

caresses

the gentle touch of one so tender
is like lightning in my soul,
illuminating and electrifying
my every nerve with energy pure
and perfect. I return the touch
and lend my love a recharging
of the ecstatic static of pleasure.

smiles

the way you cock your head when you smile
at me. it lingers like cut stone imagery left
upon the sepulchre of my love, wherein lies
my halfhearted attempt to fly, struck down
like Icarus in the sun of sorrows. too high
to hold my feathers. too low to escape tears
lapping in waves at my feet. sweet and final

tears

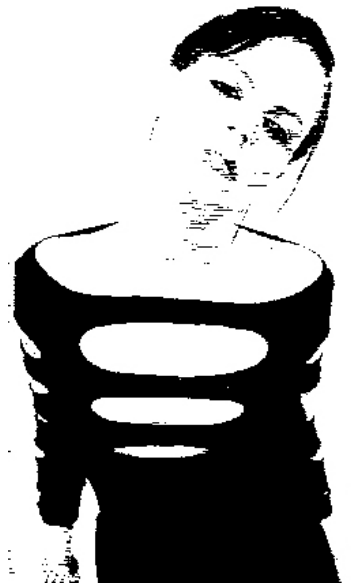
whether they be sad or glad or mad or bad,
the tears you issue are like liquid gems,
radiant and priceless. honest and reckless
they shower the unfeeling earth and leave
tiger stripes upon a panther's sweet face.

walking together

I will never be alone. for in my heart I carry
the memories and majesty of you. I'll marry
myself to what the future should have been
and live with the repercussions of once again
dreaming beyond my means. by my side
is but a phantom, a zujembie bride
cut of the pride I felt in your elevation
of me to the plateau where, in celebration
of life and love, sadness and joy, panthers play
their games of life art and chase pain away.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Forty-fourth Panther Cycle: **afterimages**



These were healing words. Expressions of love, of hope, of memory.

I am blessed (or cursed, if you will) with an emotionally photographic memory. I can invoke emotions I've known in the past, and even find new emotion in old experiences. As a writer it is a powerful tool.

As a spurned lover it can get pretty rough (editing this volume has been brutal on me, I can assure you, but it has helped me to get over some other issues in my life, sort of an emotional self-mutilation to take control of your own pain).

I still hope to outlive or outwit the prophecy in "wings of glass".

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

ambush

life held in a light and loving embrace
painted into a proud and patient silence
held captive in a haploid heart sent skittering
across the ancient arches of our mystery.
enigmatic and pragmatic poets automatically
sharing secrets sold in silent pantomimes of
legends that lend themselves to lachrymal
endorsements at the end of our eternities.
cold water poured in a cup of hot tea
made molten by a kiss that still is tasted.

embrasure

warm hands touching, clutching
offered rewards for loving without regard
for the shards of broken cookie jars
we dance upon. children held in limbo
while the supple dance dips under the bar
and the alchemists recommend base metal
for a golden heart misplaced in disgrace.

tenderness at false dawn

even in your shadow
the air is warm and I can form
my own following of meandering
dreams held captive for a restive
prayer played to the finish. true
words spoken harshly. the dark marsh
of our mourning in the morning
of a drapery drawn aside at ten.

the curve of your face

the wind regrets its duty
every morning, to slide aside
rather than linger on your lips
like a kiss forever frozen
on a sculptor's visioned beauty.

wings of glass

the sands of time are smelted into
crazy-daisy patterns of crystal forms,
frozen in the heat of the winds
sweeping across my memory. dreams
spinning ice cream drippings into
angry flechettes that tear souls
and awaken the darkness within,
fear
like a child
in a quiet house.
waiting
for morning
when there is no proof
yet perceived of a benign deity.
faith
in the hands
of the infidel,
tool
and a weapon
for a coming storm
where the wind will lift me
and I will not know peace
again, in this life.

a handful of wind

my legacy will be words
and second generation echoes
in the words of others inspired
by a sad and mad Sisyphus. birds
that fly with razor wings as blows
the hurricane I reaped in fired
furnaces where I walked thinking
myself accompanied. then blinking.

elegy

I want to dance.
but my legs are weak
and my words speak
of a lost chance.
an epic stance
taken in the wind's face
when I dared embrace
a panther's prance.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Forty-fifth Panther Cycle: **no war is ever won**



This is a crazy quilt of a cycle, full of dark images and playful wordsmithing, I think it represents well how all over the emotional roadmap I was at this time.

I was facing, due to the financial burdens of my divorce, a need to find a way out of my situation. I didn't write about that in my works, as I still considered healing the Panther and reuniting with her more important than my own survival (part of the divorce was a half million dollar life insurance policy on me, made out to my ex...so if I didn't survive, at least they'd be cared for...and I wasn't any of their favourite persons at the time, anyway.

But I kept focused on the person I'd pledged to, firm in my belief that once she and I worked things out, things would fall back into place in all other ways.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

in tarnished memory

in tarnished memories made mockery
by our weakness, left on the nightstand
like a wilting rose. discarded and unregarded
as we move to other sport, we contort
our dreams to match our paths and laugh
with self-deprecating humour at the rumours
we can validate only in silence. the violence
of time, worked on us all. the seconds ticking
and the phone ringing a rude song, bringing
unknown answers to dancers too far apart
to ever touch again. and, as such, in pain.

leap of faith

all love is a leap of faith. whether born of honest passion
or fashioned from our own desperations we deny, we fly
in the face of past follies to risk our frail frames in the sky
of a hunter's season. reasons irrelevant. lovers made sentient
by a thirst for God and continuity. the beauty burned away
by the light of day as we are made Nosferatu by our fear.
the mortar of hope placed against the clay of the poet, golem
animated by the solemn truth of strength perceived through
burnt honey eyes. life denies us our timidity if victory
is to be more than a philosopher's stone at the pawnshop
where we stop to raise stake for our Pascal's wager.

the price of penance paid for passion

the integrity of love in the heart of the romantic
is a maddening thing. it brings out the tragic
spectacle of mortal man made naked and epic
in the winds of an embrace and an abandonment
by all but his darkling sanity. profanity spent
in a dark room, waiting for the worms now sent
to consume the last morsels of fading light
once bright with the promises of a lover's delight
in a dare taken over three deep breaths. white
stained red, fading to brown and purified in time
by unknowing souls paid minimum wage to climb
the stairs and sweep away the crumbs of crime.

it is time

your serenity barely ripples,
like a pond at sunrise reacting to
a distant frog's graceful swim,
as you wake me to take me
before the evidence of love.
I hold your hand and speak
the words rehearsed more times
than either of us dare remember
as the merging melts and spawns
a legacy of triumph and patience.
even a hard-boiled egg takes time.

in the silence

in the darkness of your creative serenities, I am with you.
I have looked into your eyes at poet's time and seen true
divinity burst from you like a ripe seed pod performing
its duty to future generations. there is a bitter ring
of truth to the sound of the bells I strike in an insurrection
against the joy you wrap me in whenever I hear one
more sigh through your sweet lips. my pockets are large
but empty now. a martyr to the magic of romance, charged
with unfailing love and a desire to be silent in your presence.
if even buried deep within the earthwomb. embracing silence.

bop

a poet's chance. sold.
a panther's dance. gold
like the jasmine I taste
on your lips. sweet.
and your hips....beat
a rhythm I have chased
down this road. caught.
easy load. not
looking for dreams misplaced.

joy incarnate

love. it always stands triumphant
even when the lovers fail.
I am not a victor always,
but my needs, in truth, must pale.
we are faced with such illusions
proud delusions of our pain.
we must learn to rise above it
and our destinies reclaim.

In the counsel of the masses
we will find no relevance.
Love is found in poet's promise
held inside a panther's dance.
Drinking draughts of life and promise
joy and peace and children strong,
we find our proof in subtle rapture
truth within the panther's song.

Ecstasies we will fulfill yet,
tapestries composed in white.
We will find a way to vic'try
like a taper in the night.

The Forty-sixth Panther Cycle: **Songs of the Panther**



By this point we were communicating regularly again.

She admitted being of two minds, with many forces in each camp. It seemed to basically come down to her guilt over my divorce (and the criticism of her friends for it) and her passion for, if not me, at least “being tha Panther”.

So, I did what I am good at and sat down and composed a cycle that helped refine and define the identity of the Panther of my works, the image, the abstraction.

I can’t speak for the rest of the world, but when I have an avatar, an abstraction, to live up to as a role, it strengthens me.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

predator

I shall choose my prey, today
and take my feed and fill.
I shall choose my path, and laugh
or cry as suits my will.

I shall choose my dreams, it seems,
lest they come to choose me.
I shall choose my life, and strife
shall be, at length, set free.

tomorrow

tomorrow is a day for sun
and yesterday was the rain.
the weather comes for everyone
and gives both gain and pain.

and lovers walk in silent pairs
and part to walk alone. memory
kisses the morning sun, and dares
to come to set me free.

bard dragon

a curious beast
a furious feast
and bones that never fade.
a passionate bliss
in a haploid kiss
and a pleasuring pain's parade.

eyes of sorrow, soulful

soulful eyes, like a web
of dark burnt honey, dripping
from a scorched nest, testing
the resolve of a lover shadowed
by his own baggage. sorrow
in a thousand hues descends
and bends even smiles beneath
it's matriarchal gravity.
the solemnity of hope.
a way to cope.
the pull rope
to the cracked bell of
patience, rewarded.

the song of the panther

a voice like a haven from death,
breath passed through a soul
dancing in pain, in vain to escape
the rape of time. the field
of orchids is not yet in season
for the roses are still
omnipresent and pleasant
enough. petals testing the
mettles of us all. a choice to
voice sorrow and a curious
question that belies resolve.
to solve the riddle
of the sphinx I met
in a quiet restaurant
when I touched the face
of God.

the panther composes

the panther composes herself
and writes it down. words
on a page....sage and honest,
reflecting a worldview of
inevitable sadness illuminated
by moments of joy and passion.
she fashions a totem from a cat
to a killer, dark and deadly,
whose claws can pull a dragon's
heart in pity and remorse. power
in the metamorphosis. beauty
and a soul deeper than any plumbing
of despair may ever reach.
an angel, revealed.

the panther laughs

the panther laughs when the mood
takes her. the essential food
of her feast is sadness, but I
have been blessed to see her eyes
grow large with pleasure
and take the treasure
of this soft and sensuous
giggle of delight
to perfectly light
the attic wherein
my goblins labor
to understand love.
not in vain.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Forty-seventh Panther Cycle: **exile and passion**



The passion was obvious. But the exile?

There was a duality to that. Partly the exile from her while she worked through her guilt and feelings. And the other part was, in order to live up to the obligations I'd made to my family, I would have to take a job that was being offered to me in Los Angeles, 3,000 miles away from my children, almost as far from my aging parents and my family and all my professional network.

I referred and still sometimes refer to this as being sent into exile.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

dreams of love

immutable. cut from stone
made warm by a single word
uttered after three deep breaths.
alive and forever locked
in legend and memory. a
boomerang karma, paths
parting as in a sad prophecy,
denied but invoked. hope
held regent. love. love and dreams.

back into the jungle

there is peace on the savannah
but no panthers. and I have
had my soul forever fixed on
the Southern Cross, pointed
by Cassiopeia and a tune plucked
on a child's mandolin. and I smile
as the leaves part. for the darkness
of this feral huntress's territory
is the one place I feel at home
and at peace with all I am.

embrace

I will cry the next time
I feel your honest arms enfold me,
hold me, scold me for being so long
away. for I know no other
lair where my heart may rest,
tested and contested between
heaven and hells forged in
a heartbeat contemplated
at four in the morning. a
warning, and a summons and
a prayer for time and understanding.

bottle of sand

one night I will drink to you
on the beach. alone, but never
truly so with your heart firmly wedged
in my chest. I will sift the sands
of that peaceful ocean into the
drained vessel and have it borne
to you. not as invocation of
aloneness, or of barrenness,
but to let you know that on that
sand I made toast to you and
dreams of sand angels yet unpressed.

meeting of minds

where will a man, made god in his own mind,
find a peer worthy of his muse? can he choose
his heart to follow, or does the resonance
of fate or destiny or chemistry or god knows
what else might be to blame or bless, pick
his dreams for him. I care not. I merely
know I have found it. and will sit here, my
heart on my sleeve, my words on my tongue
and a taste for subtle laughter in my ears.

conquest

it is not meet to conquer that which you love.
for it has already conquered you. strive instead
to be worthy and honest, self deception leads
only to pain and sorrow. I have not taken
well my own counsel, but knowing I am mortal
and blinded by your beauty, thunderstruck
by your voice raised in song and twisted
to a strangled cry by your passion, I will
take my seat at the foot of Athena and
try once more to be what is requisite
for my life to be worth living.

dancing

will I ever dance with you to the song
of the seal, words gilt upon our base
metal hearts to guide us into fires
still not fully contemplated? fate
mocks us, then locks us into joy if
we show an iota of courage and
faith that the wraith now immaterial
cannot touch us without our
willing it. killing it is impossible,
for it is insubstantial. so let us
ignore and share the dreams
we forged a thousand times over.
one day. if not soon. one day.

The Forty-eighth Panther Cycle: **Dreams of Iron and Sapphire**



This is a crossroads cycle, a mix of new and old images, new and old emotions.

The “nemicorn” of which I speak is a hearkening back to “The Nemicorn”, my first lover. I love to coin words, and I later had coined the word “Nemicorn” from “nemo” and “unicorn”...literally “no mortal unicorn”. To me it was represented by a black unicorn with an ivory or silver horn, and it meant someone or something you loved so intensely you mythologized it.

You know, like a Panther.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

sapphire lasers

ruby is for lasers,
but it was a beam of light
born in sapphire green
that cut the shell
of this behemoth,
waking the dead
in dread
of memories that fled
before the aurora
of a subtle smile
sustained in soulful eyes.

heartbeat

one day
I will lay my head again
again your soft back
and listen to the reassurance
of your heart,
beating out a rhythm
clocked by God
to let me live
and love at a level
unimagined before
you moved my hair
with your hands
and made me promise
names to our future children.

lost and found

I lost myself
for a season,
beyond reason
and rationale.
your love fed
me so perfectly
I wanted nothing more.
I haunted a distant shore
in lighthouse lanterns
that you turned from
in fear of the rocks.
and I understood.
and lit the fires
on the beach.
not with our love,
but with my words
and heart
and strength,
rediscovered
in a room
where I was watched
by those who never loved
enough to surrender
their sanity.

wings of a black dove

the nemicorn came to me
in a new form. warm with
promise and power, a flower
of black silk. milk sipped
greedily from nursing breasts
to test the passion that fashions
a monument immortal, but feeble
in the face of a black lace fan
of wings rising from the bold
shoulders of a panther transcending
the ground, ascending to bound
with the dragons in the skies
where dies no legend.

courage

life calls us to courage and comprehension.
embracing ourselves and our apprehensions
about ourselves and our dreams, we wake
from our sleepwalk and sleeptalk and take
stock of our options. I will make my iron bend
in the hurricane of your need and be the friend
you would ask of me. no task of me denied,
I step aside and put away my dreams, with pride
that you would even tolerate my petitions
of love and desire, memories of brave decisions.

a clockspring

I understand your loneliness
and only wish I had the answers
you will need when your evolution
reaches the next bardot. I know
them, mostly, but am inarticulate
and feeble and my affection
discredits my wisdom in your
eyes. truth in tears and tensions
reset for a future clockspring.

worth

shall I measure you by mortal standards.
I think not, lest you become arrogant
and the air be filled with errant lies
and jealous venom. those who would
deny you your due so that they may have you
on their plane of existence. resistance
to greatness is the hallmark of any
democracy, but you were not shaped by
the hands of a democratic God, but one
willing to test the edge of truth and beauty
with elegance, excellence, and a panther's dance.

The Forty-ninth Panther Cycle

antiquity



These poems, all of them, speak of items or artifacts of our relationship. Some real, some imagined, some abstract representations.

The brass box was real. The cookie jar was a reference to the poem “bare feet on a wooden floor” which was the final act of “the Goldenheart Cycles”. Yes, it was somewhat perverse to take the images I’d given over to the Goldenheart and recycle them for the Panther.

But I think in this we see the evidences of the abstraction of my affections at this point, that I wasn’t writing to one woman, but to an archetypal lover.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

infinite mirrors

I look inside the infinite mirrors
and see reflections both forward
and back. a catalog of horrors
I would not have survived without
the strength lent me by a noble
friend. costing her the peace
of mind she sought. caught
in a clouding web of twilight dreams.

wingsong

black lace wings.
dragonfly wings.
fitted to a great beast
who,
in time,
will learn their use
and seek again
the skies of dreams
locked away under
kudzu vines of pain
and guilt and regret.

the brass box

it sits in silence
on the shelf where
once sat a Chinese
fan. containing
what is left of dreams
waiting a key
entrusted.
incrusted
with splintered
emeralds.

serene horizons

looking out, in silence.
warm thoughts
I thought
were mine alone.
but somewhere
someone
thinks the answer
and is merely
too distant in space
and suffering
to answer
the riddle.
a dancer
on the sands
of memory.

poets, pretenders and pagans

poets are the small gods.
sometimes they are
usurped by pretenders,
sad souls speaking
quick enough and loud
enough to share their
practiced spontaneity
and scrimshaw.
but the divine spark
is not there. where
they speak, the weak
are swayed to stay
their look for true gods.
and remain pagan
outcasts, caught in the
philosophy. not the
revelation.

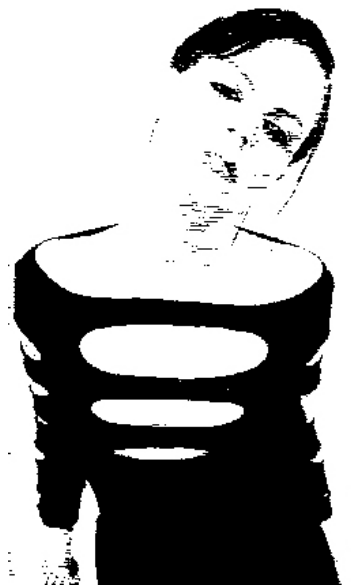
the cookie jar

it did not break.
I did not know it could take
a fall from so great a height.
grand is my delight
knowing that the ceramic
skin over this romantic
soul is more resilient
than first thought. spent
crumbs spicing the air
whenever the lid is opened.
but sometimes we pretend
not to care what is inside
out of hunger and the pride
born of fear. fear the oatmeal
raisin prayers will not find real
satience in the jar. and so
we will starve. alone with no
hope. just memories of a jar.
kept empty. kept far.

white noise

our perceptions are white noise
to our affections. we laugh
and cry for the same actions,
take days or weeks or months
apart, if our hearts have taken
a dive in the ring for a payoff.
many fear to fall from a great
height. a night I would not have
assented to for a handful of dead
petals and a dream in the dark.

The Fiftieth Panther Cycle: **In the Land of the Gods**



Welcome to Kyrienar.

In this cycle I began to weave a complex tapestry of legends and myths of a land that existed as a place where the Panther and I could be together. Where lovers were judged by their love, where poets spoke in epic emotion and were not cursed as fools.

It was a Utopian ideal, but it was a place for me to retreat in the aftermath of so many losses in so short a time. Now thousands of miles away from those closest to me, sitting in a hotel room in Century City. Most nights my only comfort being my computer screen and the words of friends whom, for the most part, I still have yet to meet face to face.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the temple of joy

behold the ruins.
study them carefully.
they stood before you and I
found them one evening,
locked in our game of
masks and charades.
if you listen, carefully,
the windborne serenades
can still be heard.
follow them to the gates
of whipped quicksilver
and you hear them yet,
echoes played by ghosts
that yet have flesh
and yet play amoung
these ruins. for this
temple is not thrown down,
and gods never truly die.

the altar of sacrifice

offerings brought at twilight
from the beaches where we saw
dancing creatures of legend
play in the surf, then run
into the woods. first two.
then one. then three. we see
the trails followed by the
dark-skulled followers
of the rhyming wurm,
and fresh scratches
where new words,
amotated in the surf,
have been cut into this altar.
taller than the sky.

the Well at Kyrienar

the dry well. ever dry of water.
but not of joy. or purpose.
made as a monument to a daughter
who chased the winged faeries
in the clearing, nearing the curve
of the songs at their apogee.
if you stand at the rim and sing
the ancient songs, you will hear
more than your voice return.
for Cassiopeia's faeries dwell
in the dark when she is away,
and play mumble-the-peg
with splinters of sapphire
until she gets home from school.

the Mountain at the Edge of the Jungle

no one knows if fate
or random coincidence
cut this mountain out of the sky,
like a biscuit dropped in lazy
plummet, here at the edge
of the jungle of legends.
but it was fortuitous.
for it was here that souls
met in the wet war of words
and tears and dreams that caused
a race of myths to build this
city of onyx spires and sapphire
palaces. one last dying gasp
of a race of mortals not ready
to taste their own divinity.
dreams of love and peace and
ultimate truths, tied up in
a dragon that never was and
a panther that could have been.

the Oracles

three statues of stone
stand at the lip
of the volcano
of madness.
each one speaks
in his own turn
and you learn.
nothing.
words that are but
tattoos on the tongue
of the fool who repeats
them without comprehension.

the Arena

Quixote fought there.
and, I have been told,
Cyrano bested his personal
best of one hundred foes in a night,
laughing with the delight
of a child catching fireflies.

the Castle

she dwelled there for a season.
and, finding it fit, yet another.
but soon she wearied and went
on. and the Castle, just at the edge
of the land of the Gods, fell into
sad disrepair. but, when she had
grown her black lace wings and
strength and reason and the urge
to build on things with some
resonance became a new thread,
she had it refurbished. and she
would daily wave from the highest
tower to the herb merchants
in her courtyard and go down
to taste the essences of whim.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-first Panther Cycle: **Shades of Time**



The clock was my enemy.

And I was its most determined nemesis.

Patience is the final virtue learned, out of necessity. It is in waiting for it that we learn it.

This cycle spoke of time, in many ways, but there was always a sense that my patience was thinning. The dysfunctionally brief moments we had spent in Tampa as I flew to Los Angeles had been bracing, but ultimately more strange and satisfying. Months later she could not even remember the gifts I gave her that day, as she stared out my hotel room window and told me she couldn't imagine a future without me.

And here I was, with nothing. Not even really promises, just time. Mocking me.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

long winter

it has been so long a winter, with only moments
of warmth. scarcely a word spoken, no token
of respect for hang on my wall next to the trophies
of sharks and meadowlarks, pale hunters next to
the feral creature I wish was here. but snow
has piled too high to see over and the cloverleaf
and spirit-thief have conspired to hide the sun
which runs away from me, enigmatic and sad.

the hourglass

I broke into the wall today. that wall of
jagged green glass, hard as an axe head
and opaque with age and arrogance. the
splinters tore my flesh and lodged in
my soul. but I had to see how much.
how much sand. how much sand was left
in the damnable hourglass. and the
answer terrified me.

two years

two years told in a wink and a smile.
the style of the assent is not a denial
but it brings back memories of words
and action more than a knowing smile.

if I were made of iron

if I were made of iron
I would wait forever for those
black lace wings to grow back.
rust would merely lattice me
with reds and browns, to soften
my image and lend character.

but I, too, am merely flesh,
and standing in the saline reign
does more than rust me. it
slowly steals what little
life remains.

schedules

we live by schedules.
we set the clock and rock
back and forth to the rhythm
of our impending demise. lies
told to steal joy while we
run the other way. honest
lies we learned from friends
and teachers, so afraid of dreams.
we welcome the alarm clock.

the patience of a poet

the patience of a poet runs hot and cold and clear
and murky. the unlucky souls who live in glass coffins
never understand the pleasure of the passion of being
intemperate. we do not wait for the mediocrity
that everyone polishes to put on their mantles,
but light candles that burn three wicks.

candle

fists full of icing, crowing like a rooster
on a booster seat, Cassiopeia finds the fun
in undoing two hours' decoration in an
instant. one candle. for this moment,
a thousand years stood still. and then
began again its march when the candle
went out. and a baby girl squealed
on her birthday.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-second Panther Cycle:

Adoration



The genie was out of the bottle. She used the word again. You know, love.

She said she just needed time and space to find herself, her way, some sense of forgiveness for her hand in my divorce and we would be together again.

I ran up a phone bill the size of a small country's GNP calling her everyday, and we'd talk for hours. Well, I'd talk, she'd listen (hey, she said that's what she needed, so I obliged...yes, in retrospect it did seem a little one-sided).

She began talking about us marrying, and having children, again. Two of them, a boy and a girl, and of her coming to Los Angeles (her business was one she could easily move, indeed, she'd probably do better in LA than Tampa).

I was not completely sold, but encouraged enough to begin writing more optimistic pieces.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the measure of love

measure my love by the size
of my heart. by the roads I have walked
from the very start of our time
together. I am not the last man
or the best man or the man you
would have chosen a year ago.
but I have proven my heart and
thickness of the soles on my boots.

the eyes of my true love

I look into those burnt honey wells
that I am destined to look into
all the rest of my life, in joy
and in pain. in the memory of the
stain of all survival. and I see
magic. an incantata of deific
beauty and majesty unaware.
I would dare anything to close
the space between my hand
and that face in which rests
the eyes of my true love.

handmade quilts

my mother will make handmade
quilts for our children, if they are born
before she is too old to stitch them.
thread pulling together patches of
old clothes, colourful and meaningful
like two lives, lived well, now
stitched together by brave hearts
what want to keep our children
warm and safe at night. and keep them
alive in our hearts so that they may one
day lay between us and dream, under
a handmade quilt.

sand angels revisited

in my heart I walk along a quiet shoreline.
dawn of a new day. and the tide only now
is coming in. I see the curve of the sand.
last night's sand angels, a lifetime ago,
before me. and the morning tide creeps
closer to try to wash away the even the
memory of your passion. and I will stand
between the sea of time and allow myself
to drawn in the cold waters of pain before
I will allow the memory of what we once
were to be lost. lost to the waters of time.

pedestals

I do not have use of pedestals.
they would put you out of my reach
and I have to stand on tiptoe as it is
to have a prayer of a hope of a dream
of a chance of being standing when
you finally descend and bless
mortal man with your love.

next kiss

the next time you kiss me.
really kiss me.
I want to hear more than
a sigh. I want to hear
your heart open up and
the fire transmit
itself to your lips and
hear my name
on the voice of a lover.

clockwork

I am always fighting against the box
you put me in.
but that is okay.
for I have heard the voice
of god and know the colour
of the sky on worlds
that no one has ever been to.
and I can dream that one day
I will be more than a convenience.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-third Panther Cycle: **Cassiopeia's Garden**



We had a series of long discussions of our future children. Ninety percent of those discussions were her talking about the daughter she wanted to have, named Cassiopeia, and what she'd be like.

So I wove her a cycle of poems about our daughter and her garden.

Now, I normally despise my shorter pieces, I'd rather go ape for twenty or thirty or three hundred lines. But I have to admit "wildflowers" really gets me every time I read it.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the low jungle

the thatch of grass is like a jungle
to two year old toes....tangling
and tripping even the best intended run
for the flutterbyes. falling down to see
the startled honeybees take wing
to bring you tomorrow's breakfast
spread for your raisin bread.

dandelions

daddy taught her how to make
the dandelions explode in a puff
of air. a thousand little dancing
angels, looking for a place to land
to make a thousand more angels
each. like love in the heart
of this child of my heart.

daffodils

as she cuts the stems of the
daffodils that grow by the house,
mommy sings to herself a song
I can never hear the words to,
but it makes her smile.
and I will sing it with her
when I am old enough
to know the words and know
what they mean. I have my
mother's eyes and she holds
the daffodils to my face and
smiles and talks of my eyes
looking like honey. and we
giggle a lot.

apple trees to climb

the green and gold and red
fruit hang just out of my reach.
even on tiptoe.
but I am learning to climb
and soon they will be mine.
all mine. and I will
eat apples still warm
from the sun.

roses

I look out my window at night
and see daddy and mommy
taking roses from my rosebush
and cuddling as they talk
in quiet voices and see them
kiss like I might get the brother
I asked for this Christmas.

buttercups

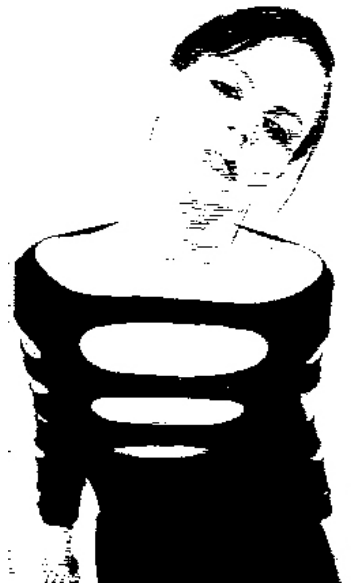
the buttercups butter up
my yard and make it
pretty on days when the
green grass is boring and
the sun shines off them
like shiny glass beads
of sunshine caught in
the green skies
of my heaven.

wildflowers

fistfuls of colour
to give to my mother.
to show her I love her.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-fourth Panther Cycle: **the High Desert**



Living in Los Angeles, I drove out to Joshua Tree and fell in love with that area, with the high desert.

Everyone had warned me about the Santa Ana winds and how they'd make me feel bad...but instead they fed me power like a high voltage line.

I loved the hot winds and the plaintive moans of the wind in the brush and the little lizards that ran around (I decided that they were baby sand dragons).

She was, at this time, trying hard to get a handle on herself. She kept saying she needed to find herself, that to be right for someone else you first have to be right for yourself (I take the opposing view, that in our love for others, we find ourselves).

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the high desert

there.
in the heat
and the light.
the crucible
of God where truth
is all that is left
I will find
the answers.
I am not the Christ
so my truths are not
so profound for it
to take forty days.
merely the fire
as I walk until
my limbs fade
and burns away
my impatient
heart.

rumination

and when
you find yourself
will you still be
someone I can love?

the tidal dream

there's a dream that I have that keeps waning
then roaring back with a blast
it keeps throwing me into a future
that is built of an enticing past
only realized for an instant
then snatched from my empty hands.
built upon roses that penetrate
and images left in the sands.
I nonetheless stand as the acolyte
until the end of the twain spirit's night.

nunc dimittis

never knowing
just what it is
nunc dimittis.
never showing
what he misses
nunc dimittis.
passions glowing
and the wish is
nunc dimittis.
coming, going.
the end, it is,
nunc dimittis.

eloquence

I asked for love and it was granted,
handed me like a mercury-triggered
thermonuclear device. with a wink
and a smile God said it was mine
to deal with as best I could. Oh, good.
just what I need...riding close enough
to the edge I can feel the gravel beneath
my wheels in that childhood nightmare.
waiting for the doors to open and see
what makes me scream. not a dream.
but I rule my heart, or so the illusion
goes. I chose to harness the team
of horses of greatest power and trust
one day I might control them. and for
a thousand reasons they lead me down
a road I can think of a thousand reasons
I should not travel. my sanity unravels
and I am left to tie the last sweater
thread off to the pillars of the temple
of Aphrodite, in hopes that, in this
world of honest ignorance, there is truth
left in my left boot, to be poured out
like water after a walk in the puddles
left by a rain that won't be back until
a season on a calendar I do not have.

like a cyclone dancing in the fields
and all I can do is hope that the compass
points this way it finally makes
its cut. for when all is said and done
I am tired of being a scarecrow
in the fields of love and devotion.
not so tired to quit, for I am made
of sterner stuff than that, I will let
my arms wither and drop before
I turn away from my heart's duty.
and I will let the skysharks pluck out
my eyes and tear the straw that once,
above the busy streets in the apple
orchard, was not straw, but iron.

in the end

in the end
will the epitaphs
read merely that we
so outsmarted ourselves
that we could not
find our ways back home?
or was it the patient
impudence of imprudent
certainty, knowing the
karma was in the bank,
we felt the arrogance
of our cowardice was safe?

ab initio

from the beginning
I knew what was before me
the fates oft ignore me
when I take my winning
hand and present it
to the croupier to pay
on the impossible play
just won. the gambit.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-fifth Panther Cycle:
an afternoon in the company of a Sand
Dragon



This cycle is best explained in context through later cycles and their annotations, so keep your eyes open.

I do make note of the fact that I got bored of coming up with titles for the individual poems and substituted Roman numerals.

Also please note that I did use the proper Roman numeral form for “4” of “IIII”, not “IV”, which I understand is a modern invention

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

I.

Why am I here, you ask? I see the cock
of your leathery head....that questioning
look of challenge. I will tell you riddles
and share with you my water. here, high
above the ocean in this sea of sands and
stone, alone we are. and I can answer
you, free of judgement. and tell you
of legends and lovers. of panthers
in the jungles of the soul. dusts
of time and crimes of timidity.

II.

you ask me of my purpose.
how so? do you not understand
the need for serenity not forced
by the hand of madness, but to
see the path between the rocks?
clarity evades me sometimes
and my own crimes beg answers
I do not always possess. I confess
to my sins, but wish to visit not
the valleys of judgement, building
beauty on failures admitted. love
is not always the quickest path
between two lines and I laugh
at how swiftly so often we
outwit ourselves, lost in the
pride of our weaknesses.

III.

what do you know of love?
rest your feet in the shade
I provide and let me serenade
you with words without melody.
an emery board to the quick
it is. dreams spilt in guilt
and terror. no error in love,
but in flight from it. like
seeking shade in the cold,
bold passions denied only
make the heart sick. slick
denials and the martyr's trials
self-enforced in the course
of making ourselves unhappy
for a purpose unproposed.
do not look at me like that!
I am not some chattering
desert rat, caught circling
the seeds left at the base
cactus. practice of self-denial
places on trial the truth
of our passions. yes, we
are mad, after the fashion
of all who think too much
to feel too honestly.

III.

I would like one day, my sandy friend,
to bring my children here to meet you.
perhaps by then your wings will have
sprouted, I have never doubted but that
you are a sand dragon, and it is only
fitting you meet my children. sitting
as the sun slides on its invisible rail
across the sky of impossible blue, we
will talk of dreams you are feeding me.
I see it in your eyes, do not deny it.
it was you who called me here, remember
how you stole my sleep? and now
I share my water, poured out to
give you precious moisture, while you
teach me introspection and courage,
two gifts I had lost, with my life,
to the winds of fear and separation.
no hesitation, had I it all to do
again, the only change I would make
would be in not coming to her side the
moment I saw she was sad. months
lost, maybe the path. and with no
backup for my seed, the quiet fear
that one day, the dreams will be ended
like a chandelier, cut suspended
to crash into my heart and give her
reason to seek another.

V.

when your wings arrive, will they
be crow feathers on leather, as mine,
or will they be the black lacewings
of a panther-nemicorn? I have worn
my dark membranes proudly, though
often they weigh me down when
I have flown too long
too far
too hard
to lift myself up anymore.
and so I may need you to carry me.
give my daughter Perelandra the
wisdom you have learned in the
wilds. give my son Elric the secret
of breathing fire in the nights.
give my son Dante the strength
to run beneath the sun of the
high desert. give my daughter
Cassiopeia the grace to dance from
rock to rock across the ridges
of the high desert. and show my
son Caspian the way to the caves
of dreams, wherein you wove
your wings and sang to me as
I sailed seven miles above.

VI.

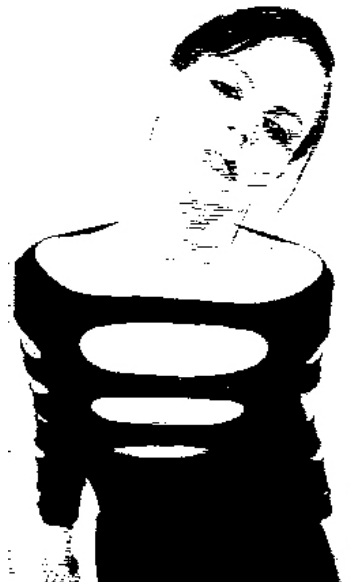
the water is evaporating.
the futility of living
in the sand, banned from
the greenery. the scenery
of desolation, pocked by
ten thousand homes of the
rats, the snakes, the spiders,
the sand dragons, and legends
of fire in the branches
of the Joshua tree.

VII.

The sand beneath my shoes
makes noises louder than
the wind in the arms
of the succulents surrounding
me with their prickly arms.
and I am not retreating,
but returning to my world.
stronger and surer. the truth
of the sand dragon etched
in my soul. survival. and
simple questions best answered
one word at a time. and only
when the water is still wet, and
not bound in clouds held beyond
our reach. I will capture clouds
for you, and make the rain,
that you may dance with me
and the sand dragons. and the
children that we love. all the
children, that we love.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-sixth Panther Cycle: **the sound of the fire**



A great yearning is found in these words.

Our daily talks were keeping me fed, but only to the point of not starving, emotionally. I began again to play Amomancer, a weaver of spell with words of love, to imagine a great future with epic adventures and beautiful children and laying in each others' arms, unashamed.

Note the reference to daffodils in “with gentle fingertips”. She’d sworn to me that we had just passed through a winter of our relationship and spring was almost upon us, and that there would be “the daffodils” to announce this spring.

I found for her a small china pin dish at a yard sale, decorated in daffodils, and sent it to her, as a symbol of that promise.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the sound of the fire

sitting here, awake. absorbing the day
as you slumber, regaining your strength
for the next assault on life. hills calling.
roads to be cut in the stonehearts of those
who live in fear and would drag us down
with them to live mortal lives. Atlas acts
as a wedge to keep the sky from touching
the ground, his hands burned where Apollo
ran his chariot too close one day. you
turn in your sleep, and you curl like a child
into the lap of dreams. and I can only pray
that I am in them and that they are as real
as mine were and one day will be again.

the sounding stones

silent are they, incapable of articulation.
but the wind through them makes music.
and you are the wind through my heart,
creating mournful and loving and playful
sounds that echo through the high desert.
sounds that leave the listener changed
forever. your love cut these courses
and the passion I feel for you forces music
eternal from them. and I am unchanged
except by your passage through me.
and in the eyes of those who dare listen.

cocoon

you dress yourself within your cocoon,
spoon-fed oatmeal and sips of herbal tea.
we know your blossoming is inevitable,
but you can feel the wings emerging
purging out the sadness to make waves
on the wind. and I can only watch, impatient
to lift that hem. prayerful to be the mirror
in which the narcissus of your soul
will seek to stare at wings of black lace
that trace the destiny of lovers forever.

a valley beyond my experience

a valley beyond my experience waits for me
to explore the seams of its stone and learn
the names of all the plants that dot the walls
of terra cotta and granite. if I pace like some
schoolboy, anxious for the bell, know you that
I am only anxious to see the sun rise over
the castles built from afar, before my eyes fade.

pain is luxury

having fallen and twisted my ankle,
but still miles from home, the desert
sun rising to strike like an hammer, I learned
that pain is a luxury. to dwell in it means
to give up life and love, truth and joy, and die
beneath the ten thousand blows of firesteel.

with gentle fingertips

with gentle fingertips I stir the still-cool soil,
praying to see the first sign of the daffodils.
praying they are strong enough to survive my
impatient putterings. for I so miss them.

labours of love

and as I hold your hand and gaze into those
burnt honey eyes for the ten thousandth time
I see them narrow with effort and wonder and
realization as the child of the haploid hearts
enters the world and utters her first poem.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-seventh Panther Cycle:

seven cards



I have never been one for the casting of runes, or accepting that someone can, with a deck of cards or a book of ancient Babylonian religious sigils, determine your fate for you.

But, I had a friend who wanted very much to read the Tarot for me, and I let her. And these were the seven cards she pulled.

I leave it to those who have followed my life and movements since then as to whether or not there was either any validity to the reading or if even I subconsciously reacted to it in such a way as to make some things more or less likely in my life.

I did find out, about this time, that she had been to seek a storefront psychic, just before she broke things off for the first time. According to the tale, the psychic told her that she would marry within the year a man who was a writer.

And that his middle initial was “J”. Which was why she had originally decided to dump me. If this is true, it’s a grievous handing over of so much responsibility to a forty dollar prophet.

I never did ask her if the story was true.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the hermit

solitude. the rude
awareness of isolation
held fast in the last
breath of shared atmosphere.
a wall of stone and wood
fastened with pain and enigma.
and the angry wind of words
made penance in the silence.

the lovers

legends on the beach.
now out of reach
to all but the few
willing to embrace
something more than
the sting of surrender
to the darkness of pain
left as a pebble in a shoe
on the road of life.

strength

whether an illusion or not.
my strength is yet what
I thought it to be when
the fire resided within me
and I can finally see
the purpose to the exercises
within my soul that built
me the way I am. strength
for another's needs, not
my own. bone polished
to tusk of adamantium
that you may have a sword
worthy of your destiny.

the page of cups

wild card. try hard if you wish
to spill the wine but it will
be nothing but a second act
in the triptych. washed away
in the resolve of the dramatic
resolution where the audience
leaves, sated. fated to remember
this performance with but a sad
smile for the bit parts.

the queen of swords

deep the blade reaches, but the seed is intact.
in fact, the pain forces a new germination,
a termination not of life, but of the frailty
that nearly did me in. twist it not with malice,
but to focus me upon your presence. draw my fire
and desire with your attentions, painful as they
may play upon the stage of my heart, and I will
take my fill of my own wounds. waiting to live.

the king of wands

sparks incandescent.
staves iridescent.
living in the present
to make room for the future.
dreams, the best teacher.

the tower

I rode into hell, once. dark corridors painted white
to hide the festering sorrows I had to face. to race
the red drops of tears leavened with pain. now I find
I must dismount and climb the dizzying rails that circle
to a sky I never met before. a war I never wanted. haunted
by truths too bitter and brittle to smile upon me, free
to wreak havoc like hounds let to run in the woods
where the panther sleeps. where the panther creeps.
and where I will be, once the tower falls beneath my siege.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-eighth Panther Cycle: **the deathless cycle**



When I wrote “listening with your heart” I wept.

Because I knew it was true, and right, but sorrowful. Despite my desire for us to be together, I knew the deck was stacked in uncertain ways and that there was an excellent chance we would never be together as lovers again (hey, my middle initial is “F”)...

But I did want to let her know that I would live with what she chose and be glad for her happiness.

Isn’t that what love is about?

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the reason of love

we cannot think faster than we feel with our hearts,
but our arrogance and conceit will always drive us
to seek to outrun the light. struggling as though
we know something we cannot believe, as if we grieve
for a truth of ancient days, but only recently discovered.

passion for a friend

I dreamed a dream again. a dream of passionate
friends, locked in an embrace of hunger and joy.
lip to lip, heart to heart, flesh to flesh. carpet burns
and the exquisite taste upon your breasts. fresh
and warm like you smile in a doorway a lifetime
ago. a forgotten crime ago. a leopard changes
spots in the season of a panther. black on black,
we stack the truth in gunnysacks and carry it
like pieces of a cross awaiting assemblage
the next time. face to face. daring destiny.

distance

we are all strangers to love. we cannot shove
past it with any hope of survival, a revival
of the conflicts of time and intemperance.
the elegance of a dance in a black dress
superseding even the fall of emerald sequins
like a virgin's tears the morning after.

friendship

a sturdy base is no disgrace
to a relationship. it is only
painful when struck on the way down.
but soon, the bruised soul may stand
again and try the handstand that got
him shot down in the first place.

the music of Valhalla

a voice echoes in the halls.
proud and pained, words of kisses
and roses and graves. the truth braves
us all for a solitary minuet. a surrogate
across a continent. and as long as
the masks come off when the dance
is compleat, a playful retreat
to survive the coldness of the
nightmist in the equinox's spring.

in the high desert

in the high desert, all things are possible.
sand dragons come to make promises
that seem beyond hope. a rope becomes
a serpent, and the serpent, a staff to be
carried by an holy man as he leads
to the Promised Land. or just another
goddamned reservation.

listening with your heart

sometimes words are never spoken.
but they are meant. bent tokens
and fallen totems. the calling diadems
that crown the regents of our champions.
and on beyond our accepted limitations
is the truth and we must merely wait until
the tree bends in the winds of time, then
reach for it. and pray our fingers still
have the strength to seize. I do not know
what comes, but if it pleases you, I will
endorse it and dance at the wedding
of the woman I love. even if it is not mine.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Fifty-ninth Panther Cycle: **seven visions**



Did I mention that we would be traveling back, from time to time, to Kyrienar?

Well, sorry...I meant to warn you.

This cycles is a series of images, nested in fantasies and mythologies, with even a rewrite of my piece from “The Goldenheart Cycles” – “bare feet on a wooden floor” as “bare feet on a dirt floor”, trying to transpose the sense of love into yet another milieu.

While far from the best of the cycles, this one presents a breather, a crystal tower of sorbet between courses of strong flavour and rich texture.

Bon appetit.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the fields beyond Solferino

he lay. destined and defeated. blood once proud
with the dreams of love, now rivulets of regret. no
body for the pyre. no kisses for the consecration.
desecration complete as the spear pierces his heart
and the folded amotation tucked away to include
in tomorrow's dispatches. found only by the ravens
and the worms. red violet banners waved to celebrate
a battle won. a war won. a love lost. and only
known if burnt honey eyes watch the returning columns
for a man too honorable to stay away from courage.

in the time of the calling

runners left to stand on sands far from the slaking river,
giver of dreams. giver of life. giver of gifts once cherished,
now perished in the remnant of drought. stout hearts
bursting to carry withered limbs to the land of the dancing
ancestors. fields of golden flowers a mirage on a horizon
beyond the tempest and the memory. fading. fading.
fading. family fleeing to hope. the four made one in
courage. made three in the darkness. two by thirst.
one by the fire of the desert sun. and none by despair.
with no love. no hope. no dreams. no life. fallen
on the sand and waiting for the pain to fade.

lovers at the well

kisses like candy set in handcut wooden bowls.
torches unlit to hide in the darkness, stolen
embraces. traces of love. faces touching
the wind. once skinned knees, now merged
souls. children to maturity, purity of passion
by the well where they played not so long
ago, pretending to find fascination in the stones
the peddler kicked while calling out his wares.
copper knives and wooden bowls. mixing mischief.

bare feet on a dirt floor

I ate an orchid today. (to settle a bet between my little one
and my woman if I could or would.) this hunter is not so ancient
that he has forgotten the value of play in the stalking wild
of a forever new world. this woman has been patient,
but loves and lives for and with this world, and late
at night, while our babies sleep, makes ritual
with me in the large room, dancing strange visions stored
in medicine bowl hearts. unbroken. bare feet on a dirt floor.

the troubadour

he plays each night in the courtyard.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.
words like a lover's kiss, sweet and hard.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.

laments and passions, dreams of light.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.
memories of pain a flower's delight.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.

to the very step of the lady's tower.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.
he lingers there, in the midnight hour.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.

unless roused by guards at the Lord's shout.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.
he plays until his voice gives out.
songs like distant winds in the ruins.

by the witness tree

he waited by the witness tree. through the night.
she did not come until the light stole first flash
across the fields of daffodils made radiant by verdant
fields beneath her tread, like the goddess of the spring
bringing the warmth with her. had you seen him
an hour before, you would have thought him dead.
but as the flowers bloom before her, so does his heart
and the part of him that always held a sliver of her
awakens to the call of the feral cat. sleek as kisses
from an ardent lover. proud as a poet on the cusp
of inspiration and pain. soft as the sound of a lovers
heartbeat as she sleeps. let her sleep that she may
have the strength to love again and come in spring,
when all things are possible. even the impossible.

the gods at Ka Latil

no one remembers the names of the gods once
worshipped in the youth of our race. ruins signify
great temples and worn and weathered monuments
that took slaves a generation to assemble. tremble
before the fate of all stone, to be thrown to dust.
just know the names and celebrate the words heard
rarely enough. truth trumps labours. the sacrifice
was too steep a price, a virgin a week. blood spilled
from innocence that the cynical may prosper. flaccid
merchants in the temple selling parrots and pillows,
gems and jaguars, idols of god that we can't even
recall the names of. amotations written in lost
tongues so that future generations will never know
who lived and loved here. but in their time, they
still were gods over all they domained.

The Sixtieth Panther Cycle: **the hours**



This was written during one of the parting times, when she would grow impatient, or a friend would fix her up with someone and she would stop talking to me for days or weeks at a time, only to come back.

I don't know why. Maybe she really did love me but was unable to reconcile herself with the breakup of my marriage.

Maybe she was insecure and I was a safe haven.

Maybe she couldn't not be the Panther. Even though, at this writing, we have not spoken in any form in years (I heard of her marriage through a third party, months after the fact) a few months ago I heard she still was using the screen name she adopted as homage to my works and my passion.

Maybe a panther, like the leopard, is fixed in colour and pattern.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

daylight meridian

shadows as compact as they can be.
I sit beneath the tree and wonder
where she is. what she is doing. I hope
she is happy and well and that, from
time to time she sees me here.
beneath this tree. and for all
the fire and brimstone and iron
and ice and day and night and love
and fear and hate and cold equations,
knows that I am thinking of her.

midafternoon

how many days have I stopped when I saw
the instant approach. an anniversary in seconds
and minutes, not days and years. sometimes
questioned, sometimes challenged, always
answered well. a door opened and closed,
signifying passage. not an easy hall to tread,
not a comfortable bed all the nights since then.
but still worthy of the mention and the memory.
forever.

twilight

she wrote a poem, once.
beautiful and perfect, as she is...
a laugh within a tear within a dream
within a fantasy resplendent. dependent
on my arc. and so I launched my soul
like a ballistae bullet, and stayed where
I landed, deep in a jungle I will always
stay in. even when driven to the edge.
I will travel in the company of lesser beasts
and drink from streams where the waters
are quenching, but not sweet. beat the bushes
to flush quarry to kill wit verbal sling, sing
songs that echo in the valleys beyond Lur.
and watch my panther dancing on the beach.

midnight

the days change. strange how they arrange
themselves to make light of the night, bisecting
it. directing it to be defined in two days. not one.
will tomorrow ever be here. I think. but sometimes
at midnight the clock stretches like molten taffy
on an apple with only two bites from it. and I
hunger for Eden. yet I will wait for the season.

4 am

I wake at 4 am and listen for your heart.
but it has fled. and you are in another bed.
circumstances favor a prepared heart
and I cannot restart an insistent heart.

dawn

if you stretch joy for three thousand miles
it tears and splits and bleeds and aches.
until all that is left is a ragged wound.
stunned silence. the violence of passion
shell-shucked like an artillery peanut.
tasty morsels barely remembered.
engendered dreams are kept alive for now.
but only by those with the stamina to dream
of tomorrow. beyond sorrow. beyond solitude.

6 am

fresh from your reflection in the morning mud.
sweat sheened, preened by the wind and efforts
to perfect those lithe limbs and that elegant back.
hair tossed and matted, like a cat not quite done
with the grooming. I hear your voice. bright and sweet.
and remember it like the smell of burnt honey
the night the candles burned down to their wick
and we could not stick around to keep the lights
on. a butterfly reborn a slug sighs and falls when
the wings are spread but the wind is far away.
and there is no answer anymore at 6 in the morning.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Sixty-first Panther Cycle: **seven wishes**



Seven small things to wish for. Images of love and contentment.

The final piece of this cycle, “your joy,” is the bomb in this bushel basket. I can not tell you how many writers have told me that they wept when they read it. I still do.

Other images sprung to mind and pen. Her distinctive wink. So obvious, but endearing. A lunch we had in Fairfax. Her suede skirt.

To quote Roy Batty...”I have seen things you would not believe.”

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

a smile

little more than your smile. a friendly smirk
sometimes a gateway to a giggle or a laugh.
head cocked, eyes bright. the lightness of mood
dispelling clouds that surround you, that have ground you
underfoot. like bells in the fog. like light
in the darkness. like memories. like the smell
of morning oatmeal, earned in the drizzly haze
of another morning...pressing for joy.

a kiss

no clumsiness. no fear. lips warm and ready.
open to admit more than air and softness, to
allow two souls to slip freely between two bodies.
the polish to the gem. the light of day. we play
like tiger cubs, earnest and happy. soft and passionate.

a wink

it means something. any man who sees that wink
of yours is trapped. slapped from his reveries and bound
to follow like a puppy on a string. who can resist
a panther's playful invitation to come closer. closer.
near enough to touch. to comfort. to share. to dare
to ask for more than a warm touch. full of life.

lunch

to talk over a salad and mugs of tea. like in that
restaurant in Fairfax, or the cafe in Little Italy
where the service was so poor, but it didn't seem
to matter so much as long you wore your suede
skirt and there was a flower shop down the street
where I could buy roses of intention. lingering
of mouthfuls of food and eyes full of love and dreams.

heartbeat

to once again press my weary head against your back
and take in the sound of your heart. holding the line
between life and death. between a world of joy and love
and a world without legends. without panthers. without
a love that signifies all, validates all, liberates all. to feel
the tears course down my face without a man's disgrace
at being touched. like fingertips on a distant screen.

peace

to know what will happen around the next corner. to know
no fear, anymore. to live without regret. to be able to bet
all I have and trust the croupier is truly cognizant of what
she holds in her small, cool hands. confidence born
of love. of hope. of trust. of destiny and its acceptance.

your joy

my grandson climbed into my lap and held out a book
to me. weathered with age, each page burned into my
memory like an immutable brand. he asked me who the
pretty lady was, whose picture marked the frontispiece.
I blinked back a few tears, shed a lifetime ago on a
battlefield where I was too busy agonizing over my role
in the conflict to take the point, as was my purpose.
I told him that she was just a dream I once met and
made happy for a season. then I sent him to play.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Sixty-second Panther Cycle: **just a man, just a woman**



Sometimes when we spoke or chatted or exchanged emails, she expressed frustration with the role of being an icon. An abstraction.

She once asked if a day would come when it would just be two people, sitting on a porch, eating apples and talking about “things”.

This came out of that, a cycle of images meant to express the beauty of ordinary people sharing an extraordinary love and lives together.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

everyday lives

we live everyday lives,
love like everyone else.
maybe a shade more epic
and intense than most,
but honest and grounded
in our sense of where we
are and where we belong.
together.

the sound of distant thunder

sitting out, watching the storm pass on the horizon.
listening to the sound of distant thunder out of
synchronization with the flickering forks of light
that dance between the grey lint clouds. sipping
iced tea with remorseless greed as the dry air bleeds
the day away from our pores as God's artillery roars
defiance to the dry earth and pelts it with water.

the dance of the hours on a grey day

time held ransom by a sudden tempered sadness
poured out like spilled oats on the floor
by impatient hands. soft and sifting,
lifting the edge of the darkness just long
enough to let me inside to cradle you
in a bear-like hug, true and gentle.
sentimental fool that I am, letting you cry
yourself out to make way for the rainbow
tomorrow, when the daffodils and roses
meet in the vase of a haploid heart.

sand on the front steps

I sweep aside the sand with the old broom,
heirloom of a summer not so long ago when
I bent more freely in the effort. but I hear
the rustle of the skirt you wore once to
flirt with me outrageously even though
you already owned my heart, and the sand
is not so heavy, and the broom is easy,
and my heart is light with love and memories.

warm apples on a summer day

picked fresh
from the tree
that nurtured them.
like your love
in my heart.
I take a crisp taste
and offer the rest
to the woman I love
and will one day rest
beside in the ground
beneath this tree
and the memory of
this gentle world.

the other blue

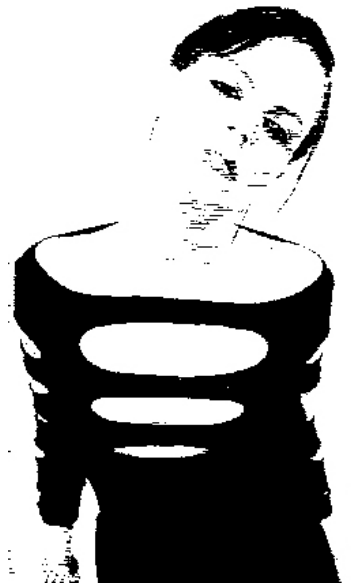
you knew
when you let me
play with the palette
that I was not the artist you were.
but since you are
a remarkable poet
I feel the need to try
to keep up with you.
so I make something
that could almost be a sky.
using the wrong shade of blue
to keep the illusion,
but you just laugh
like you did in the cafe
at two a.m. when you saw
me playing too much the fool
but loved me anyway.

the next time

the next time I see you
I won't let you walk away.
and if you choose to. take
whatever weapon you can
and slay me first, a merciful death
over the slow one otherwise.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Sixty-third Panther Cycle: **the wind in the desert**



Yes, I was the crazy man with the half-empty bottle of Evian.

It was my practice when I drove up into the desert to take along a bottle of Evian and, after I found a rock away from the road to sit upon, wait until the desert lizards showed their faces, then pour a puddle of the water into the shadiest spot I could find. They loved it, and I loved giving them that joy.

To me they were and are sand dragons, cousins to the bard dragon who needed just his hours in solitude to pull together the threads that were unraveling as he stared into an uncertain fate.

The Panther was and is an artist, and a photographer, and we had discussed when we were able to be together again having a house out in the desert, near Joshua Tree, and how I, as a writer, could stay home with Cassiopeia while Mommy went off to photograph some old ruin or whatever. Some of that found its way into here, as well.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

at dawn

filled with the promise of a day
never before seen on this earth.
the birth of new life, priceless
and perfect. hope made memory
made legend made hope again.
when the dreams return with
the morning's first wind.

tumbleweed

scrap of scruff
propelled. homeless
and heartless.
seeking root
with roots dried by
lost grip. slipping to
the edge of the desert
to wither
forever
as an object lesson
for too long adrift.

the wind in the panther's fur

on the ridge overlooking
the twisted tree that represents
eternity, the panther cools
herself in the wind as the sun
raises the tips of her ebony
fur to new heat. sweet and dusty
scents entice her senses,
defenses to be conquered
and trails to be traveled
before the end of the day.
before the losing of the way.

the sand dragon as food

the paranoid hawk returns
to feast on the skittering
lizard who thought himself
a dragon because some crazy
man with a half empty bottle
of Evian told him he was. Only
Moses should ever have paid
attention to voices on the wind
of the desert heat at high fire.

the wind at night

the sweat of the day is gone.
on beyond the howling in the rocks
where a thousand years ago a priest danced
prayers unanswered by a god he imagined
gave a damn if he died of thirst, cursed
to haunt the valley for all eternity
until he learned the right steps.
and it cools me to sit here, in
the light of the stars, and dream
dreams just as damning.

the infinite sandbox

I picked up my little daughter from
out of the infinite sandbox that is her backyard
(deserts do have their appeal) and told her that
Mommy would be home today. filled with stories
of distant lands not as exotic as the smell
of the mesquite and the sound of the wind
in the needles of the cactus at nightfall,
but beautiful nonetheless, and that next time
we would go with her to watch her stand
next to scenes we only see in National
Geographic, but none as beautiful as
her Mommy's smile when she sees how
much the child of her heart has grown
in two short weeks playing
in the infinite sandbox of her backyard.

the desert wind at night

sometimes at night I lay awake
and can barely hear the sound
of the desert wind in the ear
not pressed against your back
as I marvel, yet another night,
at how beautiful your peace is.

The Sixty-fourth Panther Cycle: **the tempering of sadness**



A friend once said that tempered sadness is the springboard to ecstasy.

I don't know if that is a truism or an excuse for bipolar behavior, but I'll take it at face value.

This is a sad cycle, expression of quiet sorrow and aching regrets.

What caps it is the oath in "if I must be a man". A long time ago I walked away from the first great love of my life when she asked me to put aside my poetry. This even after I wrote "my electric lady" which was about the regret I would feel, but the choice would make, if I had to choose between poetry and "my poor and mortal birthright" so that "I could touch the sky and see true things."

And yet, here, almost two decades later, I was swearing to leave it all behind, to renounce my identify, in truth, if that was what it would take for us to be reconciled.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

tears

soft and bitter. brittle, born
of dreams broken like frozen
taffy struck a solid blow. low
and ascendant. dependent
on prayers that reside in the hearts
of those tender enough to love
even the unworthy. proof protected
in the fall of saline rain, ringing
upon the tin roofs of our heart's
cottages, set in the fields of love.

laughing at legends

as the tailor, I must now protest
the mockery of the Emperor's dress
and his proud carriage swayed by
the revelation of charade on the part
of me. clothes cut and stitched
from moonbeams, left to dry
on the rocks by the stream
of consciousness. silkworks
and the taste of burnt honey
left in the pockets for a rainy day.

embrace

I would hold you, if you would let me near.
asking nothing, but needing everything,
silent but for sobs wasted today.
for we are all in our shells inured
to the pain of others, as in our ears
our tears
burn the loudest
and the proudest
of us must face
the path alone and mocked
for having dared to love
and stood by his vows.

rainbows tomorrow

there will be rainbows tomorrow.
and the next day, but not now.
now is the time for mourning
lost lies and illusions. balloons
burst by the worst means
possible. but we are strong
and feral creatures, whether
wings of raven's fletch or the
blacklace membrane of the
dragonfly panther, and we will
soar again. and maybe not to
triumph that day, but eventually,
for we are worthy and willing.

the patching of hearts

soulmates
left to fates
to meander
in fruitless pain.
the savage stain
magnified
by ignorance
and darkness
as the dinosaurs
of Venus come
between us.

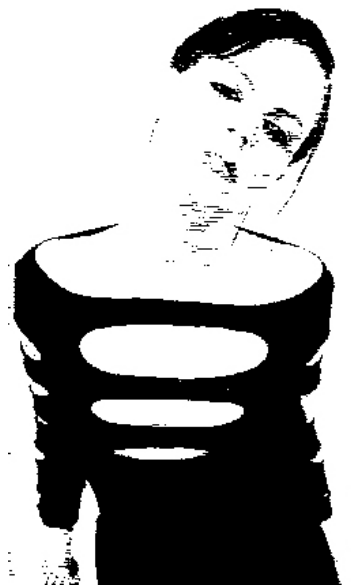
serenity like death

to hold the panther again
I must learn a serenity
like death. the breath
draw shallow and slowly
to not disturb her heart's
slumber as she heals.
not again to the level to love
like a common creature, but
back to the edge of the
aurora where once she
danced in glee and joy.
destroy my soul and she
will build it back a thousand
times with a single smile.

if I must be a man

If I must be a man to win back
that which I have lost, someone tell
me now, that I may accost
the cowardices within me
of no longer wearing scales of gold
or lifting raven wings to the sun.
one by one, my barriers have
cracked and fallen. and I have
no use for this facade if it costs
me all my life and joy. someone
tell me the price of penance
to regain the love I lost
through no sin of my own.

The Sixty-fifth Panther Cycle: **the seven lessons of the Panther**



“The common tongue” is one of my favourite works, expressing an issue I have more than once encountered in this life.

I have been accused of being too eloquent, my vocabulary too large and my tendency to take a simple thought and spin it into symphony of words sometimes getting in the way of being understood.

But all of these works were attempts to express things I had or should have learned from the Panther, or from my relationship with her.

No one has ever accused me of being the quickest study on hard experience, but at least I could express these things.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

life is never silent (Listen with your heart)

a thousand times you kept me near with words
unspoken, promises unbroken except by a temporary
derailment. and yet, each memoried impalement
drove hard against my soul. promises made by
a panther hungry to lay kittens at the feet
of the world, hungry to share her milk with
the child of her heart and the son of her soul,
to wrestle playfully the lover who cut her totem
from strips of black cloth worn as she raced
the wind to prepare her self for the wedding
of soulmates in the chapel of dreams. and I hear
the music from time to time, kissed roses
blooming upon penetrating the sacraments
drained in doorways to hearts hardened
in pride. having to close our eyes and open
our hearts to dreams we can both face freely.

panthers sometimes need the shadows (Trust love)

having lived my life in the shimmering, sometimes
obscuring light of a shimmering firestream of emotion
fed on lightning and self-immolative emotion, I could not
understand her fondness for shadows. I read it as a
reaction of rejection, not protection for a fragile
heart yearning, burning for love and dreams that I had
joined with in a haploid instant of transcendence.
but I needed to learn to trust. to realize that merely
her vanishment into the shadows of sorrow was not
a banishment from her heart and head and arms and bed,
but a need to bleed in peace and release her saline rain
to form streams of consciousness forever beautiful.

faith like a poet (Believe in dreams and dreamers)

you planted the seed within me, carved with the genetic code
of all the tomorrows you cannot yet see. but here, on wings
reopened by a kiss on an elevator, I can sail above the days
you count until the swimmers dive again and the fluids
of our souls mingle to make a new communion, and see the
tomorrow you bound me to with fantasies more real
than the feelings for that which already lived. and so great
was the beauty of the vision you cut into my heart, I would
mourn them like my children if they never lived. and the
power of that emotion is beyond anything I have ever felt.
the power of belief in a beautiful dream of destiny and love.

wings of jade and amber (Share joy)

I unfurl the jeweled wings of rejoicing.
the sound you made when I first said I love you,
crystallized into a stone of infinite beauty.
the duty of affection. worn like a millstone to many,
but in the hands of the amomancer, a tool of levity
and levitation, to raise the shaft you caught yourself
on in practiced passion seeking to find the fount
of birth and rebirth. the worth of dreams between
two bodies. as I birthed you, you birthed me and we
together are a web of souls, dancing on the lattice
of your glorious wings of light and beauty.

she did pounce, she did play (patience like a hunter)

out of the darkness
comes
nothing.
for she waits
until the prey
is close enough
that it is all a mindgame
and the prey
will play another
day but this time
at a safer distance.

let go the pain (Surrender without fear)

you cannot hold long to the pain before
it burns lies into your eyes
and you are left blind to all but
the illusions.
awaken like a kitten,
eyes fresh to the world and able
to tell a saucer of milk
from a rat trap.

the common tongue (Speak plainly and with truth)

the orthography of poets
belongs in poetry.
not in words spoken
in pain or anger or fear
of losing something or someone
held so dear
that you feel death upon you.
that is a time for the baby steps
of simple words, where commonality
is more likely true. a basic
tongue where truths are not
garbled amid the noise of well meaning
friends who read letters like
Rorschach tests and listened that night
you raved until late, finding hate
in wounded love and bitter tears.

The Sixty-sixth Panther Cycle: **Reflections on a Fading Past**



I am of two minds on this cycle. One the one hand it has “that half a heart” - for my money one of the best works of the entire tapestry of the Panther Cycles.

On the other hand we have “a story from my youth”. True story, needing to be related to our own lives, but somehow I just never liked it, never liked it of and by itself and certainly not as part of the cycles.

I guess it is like a kiss. If you love them, and they kiss well, you might overlook the fact that they had onions on their sandwich.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

undefined

I remember how you wept
when I spoke the words
to you. undefined
the role you would play.
it made you walk to the fence
and ask for a dictionary
that you might ferry your heart
to a safe place. an embrace
between lovers destined
and damned. I am here now,
at the fence you built.
where sits the Raven.
and you left a note for me.
"major, yet undefined"
cryptic words before a dance.
deadly words the morning after.
the mourning after.

a story from my youth

when I was younger than now,
my parents had a small dog.
a Pekinese name Charly.
my brother David loved that dog,
as he did and does all animals.
one day I found Charly, howling
mad, seated in the back room,
his jaws trembling, his eyes
protruding like a caricature
of disease seen in to many
Saturday morning cartoons.
and I closed the door and warned
all to stay away while I called for
assistance. I knew, I knew
that he was beyond redemption.
needing put away for his
and our own good.
but David slipped in and found
the problem,
a lock of ear hair tangled
in a long claw.
pain and frustration.
and he slipped the catch.
and told me to hang up the phone.
because, in his willingness
to look beyond my fear.
he found that destruction
was not the answer,
merely an open heart.

that half a heart

I wonder if you still have it
buried in your breast
or is it on a shelf with
the shirt I gave you. the legacy
of searching love retired
having found the prize like
Moses at the Promised Land?
40 years in the desert to be told
that I will not pass.

are the daffodil cup and the
crazy ceramic wizard holding
nightly discussions?

or are they
with the boxed knick-knacks
held in impossibly tiny hands
as we made love.
in our minds.
in our souls.
in our dreams.
in our lives.
in our pasts.

half a dream

I did not see your face
at the window where I placed
the candle. something was
there. hair dark and perfect.
soulful eyes of burnt honey
to steal my soul.
no, make me whole
from the coma of my heart.
a resurrection laid
on a lullaby back
to be carried
to be married
or be buried
with the dreams
no longer worth having.

fantasies

how many dreams daily do I launch
of you and I, friends. lovers.
like the kiss I stole on the elevator...
well, you handed it to me,
but I felt like a rogue.
I guess I needed you.
and when the secret
flew past my face and
the bongo played its part,
was my heart fuller than it is now?
crumbs left on a plate
in Soho at two in the morning.
a meal regretted.
I guess I loved you.
breakfast delivered
to share with conversation
and reclamation of dignity given up
like blood to a rose. toes
that touched the floor of my soul
like a morning discovered
at 10 am. the sound of your
heart now etched indelibly
in the ears of a poet.
I guess I had you.
butterfingers that I am.

pillar of salt

one day you will, inadvertently,
forget to turn around
to watch the consumption
of this city.
and that time
you will be free.
my love
will go with you, like spare change
in the bottom of your makeup bag.
forgotten and unneeded.
then spent
casually on a pack of gum to get the
taste out of your mouth.

matador

when they pull
the post
and the bull
is host
to my fears
will the tears
not yet shed
words unsaid
for so long
make me strong
enough to rise
to iron skies
when I know not if flight
with bring you back
or give you leave to go?

The Sixty-seventh Panther Cycle: **Heisenberg through crystallized souls**



More mystical or metaphysical than romantic, this set has some sharp and vivid imagery, and a return to an introspection rather than a reminiscence.

The first piece “dry lake” came to me while flying back to Los Angeles after visiting my children in Virginia. This was always rough on me. I loved and love my children, and I know the divorce was very rough on them and unfair to them. I regret that, and wish there was something I could do or say, some penance I could perform to make that all right for them.

But on this trip the sky was quite clear and out the plane’s window I saw a dry lake bed in the desert...and before I knew what was happening I had started scribbling this cycles in a legal pad notebook I always tried to carry with me for just such occasions.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

dry lake

in flying over the desert
I saw the dry bed of a lake.
the metaphor struck me like
a New York taxicab needing
a brake job. perhaps by
accident, but nonetheless...

once teeming with life, withered
by heat and evaporated dreams, but
leaving boundaries of what was,
to spring to life again
when the rains may return, like
love long denied.

dwindling dreams

dwindling dreams
as my hemophiliac heart
slowly, inexorably
drips towards silence.

the vile violence of neglect
slips like assassins
into the cold, golden shadows
after the test is failed.

the test of the knife.
all too well the error
of my life. henceforth
to live, not as a poet.

but, as a man. stripped
to this walk and to stand
in the safer and saner
paths of mediocrity.

silver spiders

seven silver spiders. dancing in a septagram
once woven of eclectic dramas played to slam
windows shut that you said blew us away from the tack
of our hearts' voyages. baggage, like a gunnysack
filled with things held dear, yet painfully, slowly moulding
with the narcoleptic fear of numbed pleasure, boding
failure from within our prayers, mourners stare away
a Christmas toy lost two weeks before Valentine's Day.

proud love

and if allowed to love as proud
as my heart calls me to, the
pride inside blossoming in reverent
glee, my poetry's day of Pentecost.
when words spoken in a foreign idiom
suddenly make sense in a revelation
of love. a celebration of love.
a consecration of love in which
we both prove the worth of souls
leftover from a thousand failed
past lives. poisons purged in passions
urged like three deep breaths
that transfigured the world.

tender dreams

I have shared my tender dreams with many eyes
and ears and hearts and minds. there are no lies
behind my passion for you. true to the mark, a sling
propelled me high in a ballistic arc to you, to bring
a taste of lover's candor to the Pandora chest
locked away by doubt and despair. I dare to wrest
the high abandon from your avatar and take
into me his identity. I do this for the simple sake
of your love. for if a man seeking to be divine
cannot court your favour, perhaps it is at last time
for the spark to fold itself, mold itself into a sphere
of human emotion....that I may, at length, draw near.

hailstones

the Panther laid a gentle snare with
the touch of her hand to my hair
in a moment when I was so spellbound
by soulful, burnt-honey eyes, that I
could do little but weep in despair.
precognition telling me we were doomed
to never share more than a saddening tryst,
words kissed from the sky in wet regret
like hailstones on a hot Florida day,

renewed communion

my arms encircle you to lay my
healing hands on the small of your
back, back in my arms. your dancer's
legs embrace me and your body glides
to encase me in the womb of your passion.
I kiss the shuddering from you as
the impalement takes it's toll and
you, with failing control, hold back
the months'-dammed hunger to drink
from within me the sin we share
in caring for one another. I kiss
the soft and rising pink meringues
of your breasts and softly suckle
as if to draw strength from your
warm fluid. a new id forms and
merges through us, merges to us
and splinters the lock once set
against us as you feel me give
up the warm wine in a renewed
communion of lovers forevermore.

The Sixty-eighth Panther Cycle: **love without regret**



I am still amazed when I look this far into the cycles and see new imagery and thoughts. Someone once told me that romantic poetry was dead because there are only a finite number of ways to say “I love you”.

Guess that guy was wrong.

Here I go, speaking of love, both in the abstract and in images from both the past and our fantasies of our future together. A bit all over the place, but still a good run of words and thoughts and emotions.

I wanted so bad to feel love without regret, without feeling like I was doing something wrong.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

cinema

dreams dappled like the back of a pony
seen in a long-forgotten Disney film
where the heroes always won
the villains always lost
and lovers only kissed.
and then, only in the final reel.
I feel sometimes caught between
the sprockets in that projector,
unable to change anything
but the showtimes, as the wheels
turn and the light burns the images into
the minds of the onlookers. never knowing
that the hero is really the villain
the villain is really a nice guy
and the lovers did more than kiss
last night in the dark of a theatre.

the touch of life

your hands.
like God on the ceiling
of the Sistine chapel.
giving me life.
giving me hope.
redemption through grace
and the kiss of an angel
too long in a distant heaven.
too long between communion sips
from the lips of a feral woman
made legend
by my words,
but only speaking the truth
of what is inside.

umbrellas of hope

perhaps they are not sturdy enough
to endure the winds we throw at them
in foolish pride and arrogant self-doubt.
but we must pop them out and take our best
shot at keeping us free from the rain.
gales of tender tears, spent on lost trails
following will-o-wisp illusions that promise
pleasure without pain. dreams without waking.
giving without taking. medicine show theatrics
as the rain is made by God, not man.
not even poets call it, we merely know
how to read the clouds, and promise
to be there to sweep the mud from
the sidewalks of your soul so that clean
passage is possible again. maybe this time.
maybe not. maybe I'll never again know
the colour of the sun. but I remember well.

4 am revisited

last night I awoke from a soundless dream.
unmemoried. my mind clear as light in
untrammelled sky. and I did not cry out.
I did not grimace with the loneliness.
I merely turned inside myself and listened
with the heart you helped fashion me to withstand
the dark passions to be unleashed by your
passage through my life.
and I heard soft echoes.
a heart through a lullaby back,
a gentle sound. boundless with joy
that transported me back to time
before complications.
where I will go again.
and live.
as only lovers may dare.

walking like wheels

an eternal cycle of one foot in front of the other.
a dying dream of lover and friend and father and mother
held aloft like a bannerette before the armies of care.
where amomancers cast spells and lay wards at the caves
high above the valley of the shadow of death, where I
one, twice, fell. no, was pushed, and no one caught me
but my dreams. dreams that still live and everyday that
they breathe grow closer to the light. and I have climbed
higher and farther and faster than any sane man would dare
and now feel the iron winds in my hair, demanding...
commanding me to leap. leap into arms only now beginning
to open. and if this fall is all there is...then I will
sing death songs on my fall and pray that love is not
just an illusions. but live with the results of the wager.

kisses

may I kiss you once again?
knowing that if the barriers break
we may take a long time...decades...
recovering our equilibrium. the sum
of the actions and reactions in that
gentle meeting of hungry lips may drive
us beyond the edge of where we thought
we would dare to stand. to sit. to lay.
and the delay is unbearable. but I would
rather kiss you. and have you mean it,
than waste my life on lesser loves.

the return of the bard dragon

letting go his false idols of love.
he opens patchwork wings, scar tissues
barely fading from the red of pain...
in vain surrender to his muse, he arches
his back and slides into the passionwinds
he still feels in her soul...praying for life
but daring death as he spirals in to see
if there is still love enough for legends
to live. or if he must find healing
balms at the apothecary of another enchantress.
but he is game to seek to fulfill his true fate,
knowing it his not his flaw if the winds
prove false and fickle. sick with fear
he dries a tear with a single word of flame.
a name he may only speak in private.
for now.

The Sixty-ninth Panther Cycle: **The Next Night is Forever**



We made a little pact.

And that is what this cycle's title is about.

She vowed that if ever we slept together again, it would be an end to all doubts and hesitations, that we would stay together and live together and marry and have children and grow old and die as a couple.

Pressure? You bet. But I have always been one more for the grand romantic gesture.

“and the rain washes away all sorrows.”

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

surrender to the kiss

lips approaching the event horizon of souls so grave
and distant, they have spiraled in like neutron stars
in the death grip of their own gravity. faces that slide
across one another to smother the pain of too long kept
apart. a start reborn. tapestries worn to shield us
now yield us a soft wall to crash into and through as
we tumble like acrobats into the nets our hearts wove
so long ago. fire and negation. arms racing to embrace.
and then.
and then the moment of truth.
the truth passing between lips touching and parting
and merging like the dancing souls behind them.
sliding like arms fumbling against cloth yielding.
fielding questions
irrelevant
in time spent too far away
too cold. too long denied
and so we must make penance
in a penetration your body rises to in sweet memory
like a remembrance of wildflowers of a youth only months
before. and the lips never part, for fear the kiss
will end. and so we share breath for fiery moments...
as I come home and take my rest and joy within you.

taste of blood

predator unleashed.
too long without the freshkill.
taking her fill of the flesh
she remembers tasting a season before.
sweet. musky. a trace of rust and blood
that tangs her tongue as she suckles out the
juices she needs to bleed the pain from time
lost. the cost of hesitation repaid a thousandfold
in golden kisses, sweet and sinful. brimful
of the white wine of lovers' communion.

a pulse of life

we stop. silence. and feel our pulses blend.
befriending the truth. acknowledging the proof
throbbing deep inside a penetrated panther.
a dancer, on point, on fire. on the wire of life,
daring to be wife to a legend. to be a legend.
to feel his pleasure and treasure her own in a
slow and driving grind of fragrant fur against
the hunter, sated. the cries of the vanquished
taken as token of hunger and thirst and the asphyxia
of a heart quenched in the air between your thighs.
surprising us both.
the pulses merge.
and in a surge that rockets from my soul,
through my flesh.
into your flesh
and finally, into your soul...
life is affirmed.

entry

eyes locked in loving tribute
as you feel the weight upon you.
you feel the fate within you...
giving ground...making way
so that hearts may play
on the fields of pleasure.
the wings unfold
and in comes
the cornerstone.
the missing bone of the puzzle
needing to be solved.
pleading to be absolved
of everything but love.
and the need to be as one
when such is the design.
sinking into place.
spreading wide the way.
bringing into play
recesses and corners
unilluminated for far too long.
far too long.
and the panther's song.
rises in beauty and delight
all through the night.

the rain washes away all sorrows

like sugar running in the flood
the blood
of martyrs is washed away
as we play
in the thunder
that punctuates your cries
as I punctuate your gentle body.
the lightning
arcs like your back as you attack
me over and over...swallowing
my seed, my soul, my life
in yours...
and the rain washes away all sorrows.

fear in your eyes

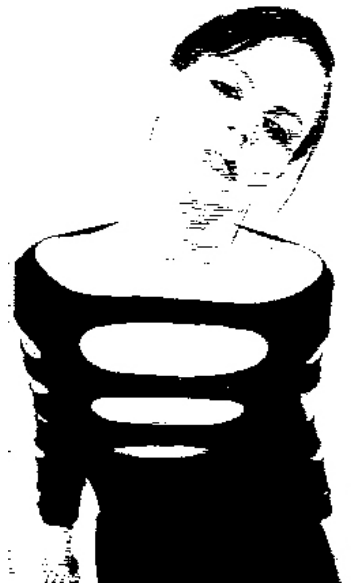
a labour of love. great and promised.
perhaps intimidation, perhaps apprehension
as the dimensions of your desire.
you conspire to hide it, denied it
for so long...
but as you sink on bending knees
to please us both...
there is fear in your eyes.

coming home to die

making love with my panther
is like coming home to die.
for all the fear, it is as it should be.
and there is no other place
where I will know peace.
the pain will cease and God
will smile at my nunc dimittis.
for He knows the song of my soul.
and He is happy that I have found
the answer to my quest. and am blest
to be here, with you. tonight. and forever.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventieth Panther Cycle: **the city of legends**



Kyrienar now had another name. The City of Legends.

In September, 1996, I sat down and taught myself HTML, (Hypertext Markup Language) and built myself a website on Earthlink, which I, in a fit of whimsy, named “The City of Legends” after this cycle.

Two weeks later I saw it listed on Yahoo, which at the time was the #1 search engine on the web. Along with the link was a description of myself as the “Romantic Poet of the Internet”.

Never give up a good sobriquet.

These poems expressed the journey, the patience, the effort involved in waiting for my Panther to get herself into the emotional condition she felt she needed to be in order to make the journey to be with me.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

early on the road to the City of Legends

so far so good. we should be further down this road,
but considering the wheels are worn and the load
is much heavier than previously estimated, we have
done remarkable things on this voyage. we can laugh
at tears once shed in dread of nights spent apart.
we can kiss and not fear the merging of this haploid heart.
we have conquered. many battles still wait for us, fed
by fear and forces uncounted. but when all is finally said,
I shall be here for you. more scars than I wanted, yet
transfigured in your love into a paramour, whole and perfect.

without regret

in thirteen cycles of the moon I have traveled far
and tasted both victory and defeat. the sweetness
of a feral jungle cat's embrace and the disgrace
of being locked outside the gates at night, white
with fear and black with the soot of effigies burned
for vanity. sanity deep dip baptized in a river running
like a fantasy child across the wildflower meadows.
windows opened as door slammed shut so that the
dying heart could flee to save itself. but did not.
love sustains me. fear restrains me. silence pains me.
and all the while I love without regret or let.

this heart

this child of my heart may never be flesh.
but in my heart, she is fulfilled in words willed
by one who has earned my love with courage
and grace. no place for the timid, this mantel
in the hunting lodge of mysteries to be unlocked
like your passions in the aqua night of satin.

if I am to live without fear

if I am to live without fear, then it must be in your arms.
for without them, the confusion and pain is a monument
to fallen hope. love will lay in ruins battered by the storms
of a thousand tropical summers. the coinage long spent
on tourist-trap trinkets unworthy of our dreams and touch.
buried in mountain snows to not melt in the history of man.
crushed beneath the tread of titans birthed with such
venom that they can only be the sons of a rage that began
deep within the despair of Sisyphus. we, as mortals, need
our Gods. for whether they are real, or myths, the legend
sustaining our souls. teaching us to live above our fears. read
the words you have summoned from a lover and a friend.
for when the next chronicles are taken, a panther and a poet
will live in these pages. for love. no fear. no regret.

I will wake up tomorrow

I will wake up tomorrow
and you will not yet be there
beside me.
inside me
you are always there,
but sometimes I want to
touch the woman that I love
so well.
to smell her hair.
to hold her when the cold world
kicks her a little too vividly.
but even though she
is for now
distant
and I am alone.
I will wake up tomorrow.
and thank God she yet lives.

water from the well

the water from the well
tastes sweet
and cold.
and old
wives' tales
tell me that there
is magic in every sip.
would that I could
take a drip
and bottle it to sell
to the shaman
in the canyon.
to make a charm
of sand dragon skins,
with which to bring
your love back to life
while I yet endure.

a panther in her den

matted grass.
she lays on matted grass.
and stretches early in the day
to begin her hunt. new life.
new prey. she will play
for a time, then hunker down
and grow steely and resolved
like the predator she is. bright
and stygian. black and glossy.
in my heart. in my mind.
in my life.
in her den.
for now.

The Seventy-first Panther Cycle: **passions of a bleeding soul**



From time to time our conversations and exchanges would turn from abstract to erotic and she would tell me of her fantasies and desires, which of course did little to curb my impatient fever.

Here is an immodest selection of works about fantasies we'd shared (or lived out, already). One reviewer said it was like peeking in your parents' door to see them in the act of making love.

Hopefully we aren't that old that everyone thinks of us their old folks, but just two healthy, passionate, loving people, eager to share their desires with one another as an expression of their love.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the darkness

we feed the darkness with our desires.
untamed fires held back by pitiful firebreaks
that hold no more at bay the tongues that play
at consuming us, dooming us to the wet and wanton
consummation.
penetration.
the deep
deep
deep
dive of surrender
as you lock your eyes in mine
and twine about me legs that beg
for the pain
the pleasure.
the greatest measure
ever taken
ever dared
ever bared
to stab inside you
and draw the blood
of your ecstasy.

sharing liquid

drink from me, if you dare.
I'll hold your hair in my hands
and span your soft, sweet, hot
flesh with my thirst.
cursed to feed on you
as you struggle valiantly
to hold on long enough
to drink first.
but as compelling
as the arguments
on your lips,
you slip and find my
wormtongue
buried deep within you...
drawing out the cries of despair
and anguish as you feel the
flood of blood explode
inside you and you ride my
lips to the edge of sanity.

a new entry

never touched.
never taken.
now forsaken
barriers falling
to the curved steel
of this samurai.
sliding
in
and out
as you grip the
fabrics of the boudoir
and cry out in pain
and poorly hidden exquisation.
each piston draw sucking out
the demons of degradation.
each piston plunge
a lunge of hot iron
that makes you roar
as you soar on winds
of wicked desire.

seven times

seven times in a single battle
drawn to the gates of hell and left
to fell the tallest of the temples.
heart pounding, breath sounding
loudly and tortured in ravished lust.

merging in the afterglow

in the afterglow of your evening,
I feed on you.
drawing sips of warm nectar from
breasts unashamed to let me take
my essence from them as you rise
and ride
and glide
and slide
up and down on the carousel.
my hands against you, pressing you to me
as I lap each stolen drop
of your nourishment.
and return it in fluids white and musky.
sharing the flood.

dancing like demons

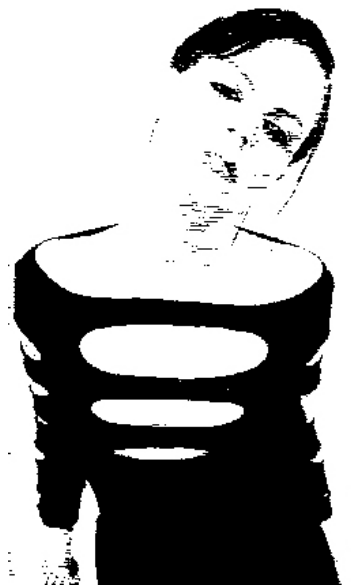
my hands dance like demons
across your back....
taunting
haunting.
pressing you to the rough shag
as I lay against you and take
what you would have denied me
had you run swifter.
the force so intense
it rubs you to cry out...
content in the passion...
your senses dancing like demons
beneath my barrages of pleasure.
beneath me.

tomorrow

tonight we have each other.
an illusion of dreams that screams
for incarnation.
but the immolations
of yesterday
still burn within us
and we are bound to follow
and fall
in other spheres.
tears a poor substitute
for the sweat of honest toil.
we soil
ourselves
with our passivity.
the perversity
of the joke captures
not our fancy. but entranced
by the dance of the damned...
we can do little but laugh.
and when tomorrow comes
it will only be a question
of who wakes up second
to find the other
gone like a dream
into the fading halls of memory.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventy-second Panther Cycle: **Truths without Exception**



Truth is elusive, but simple. Truth is atomic, to determine the integrity of a thought, look for moving parts.

Truths should be without exception, and I tried to state seven truths. That time has not held them all together is not a denial of their integrity in the moment they were realized.

I do still believe in what was and what was to be, and I was content in knowing that I had loved as well as I could.

Call me inept, but not insincere.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

I want to grow old with you

I want to grow old with you
and see the years blend their art
skillfully into your face, their trace
of wisdom blossoming in the hair
I love so much to touch late at night
when the light is low and you sing
me to sleep. to keep coming back
for more caresses and long, honest
discussions of dreams and sorrows.
sharing all my tomorrows with the
woman I could never love another after.

I believe in you

I am an arrogant man,
spoiled by his talent and successes.
a man who professes to like the person
he has made of well-wrought raw materials.
so I would not sell my soul
for less than the finest companion.
I have witnessed your mind in action
and marveled at its cunning and wisdom,
seen you care for a wounded friend
and held yourself together in storms
of tears, light bitter hurricanes of pain.
no one is perfect. but you love
and give of yourself so well, and I tell
you there is no one in God's creation
I could believe in more than you.

I need you

every day without you
is like a sickness unto my soul.
dark and leeching.
stealing hope and joy
once rampant in this heart.
part of me died when you went
away. but enough survived
that I may yet rise on wings
of lavender-black membranes
if the panther so approves.

you need me

forgive my arrogance.

I am a poet, and such creatures
as we (for you are one, as well)
may tell arrogant truths without
fear of pretension. I mention
this in preamble to my point
(such as it is) to be made without
delay or distraction. of course,
you note I am rambling on...perhaps
I am trying to find a polite way to
say something impolitic. or perhaps
I am hoping you do not require me to
spell out for you a truth so profound
that it seems everyone who knows you
seems to know it in seconds, but is so
afraid of countermanding what they see
as your will that they keep still and add
a coward's vote to the crime. I'm running
on, I know...

hmmm...

oh well, hell.

the simple truth is, regardless of all the
pain and problems brought down by something
as intense and painful as our love, you need
me. as a friend, yes. as a partner, yes. but
also as you love, your soulmate, your paramour
and husband, all the wonderful titles you once
bestowed on me without regard for the
damnations of others. you need me. and I
stand ready to stand service to you as long
as I live. and, enwrapped in the joy of your
embrace, I pray that is forever.

I cannot love again once you have gone

if fate should strike me down.
and you, in fear or folly, flee...
that is all for me. I will live,
I know...but my heart will die.
a slow and lingering death with
a scream like Krakoa. and the world
will know that there is great art
and infinite pain, in loving
too much, too well.

I am your poet

you woke me from the death of my sleep
and fed my love and fantasies.
earning my affection
and my adoration
with your kindness and love and beauty.
it is my duty to record what I have seen
and felt and tasted and heard and smelt...
and thus, forever more, even if
exiled to the pagan shores of another's
arms...I am your poet.

you are my panther

grace is grace.
granted, agape over eros.
granted, kairos over chronos.
I love your face.
and your feline walk.
and the way you laugh.
and your giggles.
the way you think
and the way you drink
your diet coke with lime.
and no matter which path
you choose.
whether I win it all
or lose
my soul forevermore.
you are the panther.
and I pray, mine.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventy-third Panther Cycle: **the colour of dreams**



This was brutal on my brow. We had just gone through a time where she had fallen from the faith, doubting if she did or could love me, there was just too much baggage.

In my melancholy these words oozed from some dark recess, to state my sorrow, my hope and my resolve.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the Reich of self-discipline

you are alone because you choose to be alone.
I am alone because you choose to be alone.
the balance is not there, but the justice is.
truth like a peach,
crimson with overripeness,
nectar oozing in rivulets of pink sweetness
not unlike the last feast of passion I will ever taste.
memories unerased by the passage of time,
the message of crime uncommitted.
unremitting love.
sad.
as sad as a clock's song of solace.
less than the truth, more than a lie.
we cry in corners hidden from the watchful eyes
of our internal, eternal, infernal critic.
epic and poetic epigrams that slam doors
of opportunity as the fruit
slowly
slides
from its anchorage and
falls.
falls.
falls from the summit of dark kisses
and the joy of love play
into the isolation of the hard earth
amid the bitter blades of sawgrass
and the Reich of self-discipline.

too many clocks

hands set
to get
us up and running
for the horizon.
too many clocks
mock us
with each tick and tock.
we grow angry at them
for reminding us
that we have fickle hearts
and fates intervene.
so we smash them
and trash our dreams.
for it is not our fault.
we blame the clocks.

at ground zero

at ground zero
we find the hero
we once admired
is now mired
in the mud of humanity.
barking the insanity
we once took for art
and beauty
the duty
of the gods, humility
instilled skillfully
or brutally...
whichever works.

Darwinian hearts

Darwinian hearts
parts played
in a charade
of emotions
too deep for the sleep
of saints.
the restraints
that bind our destinies
can be cut.
but.
would you forgive me
if I tried to live free
of your sphere.
every time you pass near
I weep.
I sleep
alone...wounding a thousand
worthy hearts
in silent prayer
for an unwilling suitor.
pewter, not silver.

when tomorrow blossoms

the winds will be sweeter then...
stars pock a sky like infinite
pinpricks in the skin of a black tomato,
boiling to shed flesh
in the juices of the dawn.

the scent of stone and sandalwood.
the feel of sand, once destined
to make angels of,
now spread beneath cautious feet.
the music plays and the pipes
haunt you with sweet memories
both committed and planned.
fires fanned, then banked
as coals as goals once central
became fears and tears and near
death experiences.

I will not be there with you.
for the day before you
realized what you needed...
I fell in battle
with my heart.
out of ammunition.
and too proud to cry
surrender
and beg for my soul.

trip hammer

rapid fire
the red wire
snipped
trips the detonator.
I cannot hate her
for seeking life
above my love.
the magic glove
must be worn
at all times
to protect us from
ourselves.
and thus
we insulate
ourselves from all
but a semblance of joy.
and I will pick up the
shards of red razor glass
that is wet with my blood
and rebuild the golem
for another vain dream
that will never be.

hope

I pray you live to love again.
but never in pain
and never in vain
and sever the stain
from the tapestries
once woven with pride and shame.
and a name to be shared.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventy-fourth Panther Cycle: **dreams and verities**



I still believed in the daffodils, in the dreams, in the fantasies, in the Panther.

She did too, from time to time, when the isolation and distance did not swallow her up. When judgmental friends did not wag fingers in her face. When things seemed possible.

“Three becomes two becomes one” was the inversion of the concept of us making Cassiopeia in our love (“two becomes one becomes three” being our phrase for having a child).

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

kissing with my eyes closed

soft lips. the fumble of noses
seeking the right angle of parity
and clarity of contact. my hands,
your hips, pretension slips away
on kitten feet...silent, but clumsy
in a delightful way. senses play
not tricks, but truths, on us.
and we know what this means.
even when we lie to ourselves
and run and hide. I pride
myself on the kisses we have shared,
dared to lay as foundation for
hope and love as precious
as a baby's first laugh.

pride of authorship

we pride ourselves on our creations.
and yet, our greatest work lays
obscured by all our work-room
clutter emotions. sawdust and
that lost hammer, thrown in a
corner, not out of disrespect,
but haste and auteur's passion.
this script is grander than any comedy,
this poem is sweeter than any cycle,
this evocation advertises the best
in woman and in man, better than any
brochure or slogan. we are the art
and will be judged one day in
the eyes and minds and hearts
of those who descend from our
actions and our fleshs, based
on our pride of authorship.

was it you?

was it you who dared to hold me
on a legendary night
and kiss away the cowardice
of the sun in bright
surrender to our love? I thought
it was you, for the fingerprints
still linger on my heart,
nails dug in writhing
pleasures, treasures
left at the foot of the altar
of the all-seeing god
who is impassive, for we
must find our own divinity.
and make our own trinity
of two become one and beyond...

three wishes

someone asked me the other day
what I would do with three wishes.
a simple quest, but not one easily
answered. for there are enigmas
within a wish, action and reaction,
no retraction of hastily worded
desires before a monkey's paw.
but I know what I would wish for.
I would wish you love and hope
and happiness. for in your peace
is where mine would be born.

dancing on the beach

toes cutting a rug on sand.
bland lights left far behind....
the twilight shadows beckoning
us to make sand angels as the night
wears on and we are left
with little but the all of
who we are when we are at our best,
wresting love from the sadness
and clarity from the madness
of this graceless age.
but here, with you, dancing
on the beach, rapture is in reach
and God turns up the volume
on the waves, to keep time
and let us know He likes
the step we take.

three becomes two becomes one

I was once a man for you.
three dimensions, five senses,
infinite possibilities.
and in time I faded.
distance and fear.
other distractions,
other evocations.
down to two dimensions, two senses.
paper and words. sometimes heard.
sometimes too intense
to dare to speak aloud.
no touch, no taste, to fragrance
of your skin at 4 in the morning.
mourning lost pleasures.
and how long will it be
until I and we are merely
a single point, senseless.
a lesson learned of fingers burned
because we lacked the courage
to seize life when offered....

I want it all

life came to me one day.
panther footed.
it offered me a life. joy.
love. the fire of my soul
fanned into its destiny
to create a legacy.
a love. a dream. a child
of your heart...
and now the puzzle comes apart
and I am asked what slice
of this dream is enough.
and the answer is
none.
I want it all. all of you.
all of me. all of us.
all the promises and all the pleasures.
the infinite treasures we once
bartered everything for.
and even if I must wage
war with the universe
to claim my birthright.
I stand ready, tonight,
to ride into Hell on
the back of death himself...
for I will not be less
than what you made of me.
for that insults you.
and that insults love.
and I am a gallant man.

The Seventy-fifth Panther Cycle: **kinda/sorta**



A long time ago, in the early days of the whole Panther controversy online, a romantic rival (indeed, the fellow who was the other side of the triangle behind “The Eighth Panther Cycles”) asked me in chat one day if I was married (he knew the answer, he just wanted to tar me as an adulterer) and I replied “kinda/sorta”...and the term stuck for “Yes, but don’t try to pin me down.”

I was howling my pain in Venice Beach, feeling love dance away, surrounded by suitors who had been captivated by my word and heart and wanted to be the next “Panther”.

I was faithful until the end. For Bard Dragons are monogamous creatures , when they are emotionally healthy.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

commitments

wordless words of love.
a wingless dove
shot through the heart
with a starter's pistol...
blanks fired into the ranks
of the army of the loveless.
legions who will never ever
know the spark tasted
in a moment of guards
dropped to blow wasted
years and irrelevant fears
away for a day. and forever.

passions

is it no sweat?
no regret
that we have yet to consecrate
the contract of our hearts?
are things as obvious as they seem
or are we oblivious to a dream
we cannot reveal. the seal
is unbroken and we share a token
embrace in arms across a
continent of discontent.
soon enough bridged
by the force of will and love.

a wooden box

secrets sent in a wooden box.
icons of goddesses surpassed.
rings of metal and hematite,
sent to you, bent to do
my symbolism. someone worked
hard to carve the flowers in the lid
and sides, taking absent prides
in their artistry. day after day
for third world wages. never
knowing that one day their work
would carry an amotation.
an amotation that would remake
the world in a warmer image.
in a distant land.
in a wooden box.

romantique

flower petals on satin sheets.
bought for a poet's ransom.
ambiance in the arrogance
of daring to love, caring to share
a path where others could
not tread, for they do not know
the value of beauty. jaded hearts
will not cut the key to peace.
sands shifting in the narrowing glass
as we pass the days waiting
for the call to arms in the
hot war of wills and surrender.
tender nights, a presence
of pleasant joy at 4 in the morning.

said without words

I did not get the line I would have scripted.
words that would have lifted me on wings
of elation and joy. but they were there,
hidden in the intonation and hesitation.
I heard them. you confirmed them.
and I am lifted again, by love, to dream.

return of the huntress

in pain and defeat she hid.
licking wounds deeper than flesh.
nicks and picks and penetrations
into her soul. a thousand doubts.
a cat on a log bridge over a waterfall
of judges and drudges. loveless hearts
unable and unwilling to share her dance.

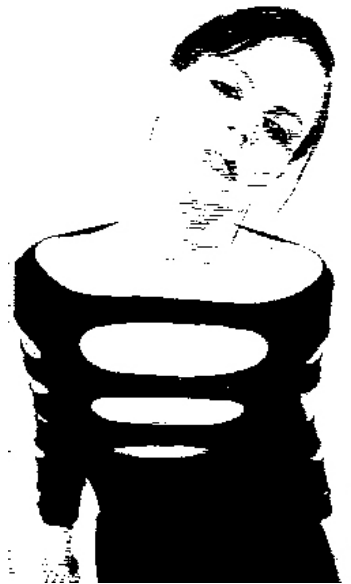
but in time, the healing of the seasons'
shift will lift her tired head and a bed
of moss and memory will give her rest
to test twice-burned pawpads on the stones
of the streets that wind in the ruins. few
in this life have dared to follow the truth.

but the proof is in the perspective when pulled
away to be observed in honest reservation.
and the wounded beast shall feast again
in a city of lights and heavenly images.
dancing on a new beach, out of reach
of the jagged, ragged rocks where once she fell.

how was I to know?

I didn't mean to fall in love with you.
how was I to know
you'd take my soul
and turn me into a child,
newborn and wild
with desire to live
to give
all I have
just for the touch
of your hand.
a brand
burned into me
so completely I cannot
stand to live
outside your grace...
away
from your face
there is no light.
the night
goes on forever,
with promises to come
still humming
in my ears.
the tears
of pain
will become rain
of lovers' kiss.
a dream
a theme
I'm glad I didn't miss.
so glad you struck the snow.
how was I to know?

The Seventy-sixth Panther Cycle: **liberation**



Freedom is a potent prison. It is an illusion, and illusions hold us firmer than any alloy or rope.

Here I was wrestling with the last vestiges of my dreams and hopes and prayers of a reconciliation. By now the relationship had settled into a travesty of a romance. I was steadfast, she was having one night stands. I was locked in my quiet room, writing of her beauty and glory. She was telling her friends she wasn't the Panther and that I was just "some guy".

Of course, this isn't the picture she painted to me, she still needed the emotional feed that came from my worship and adoration.

But, if we only loved the worthy and the willing, life would be pretty dull and pointless. For doesn't God love the unworthy and the unwilling?

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

the freedom of clarity

to know there are no hidden shadows.
half truths of words and actions incongruous
to one another, the mother of necessity
is invention. for by our lies we hide
that which we need. never having to choose
between losing face and losing grace.
a coin ungambled never blossoms into
a fortune. and the trust required to make
something more than codependent children
of us all, it never arrives. like a book
that never comes in the mail on your birthday.

the chains of love

I did not forge this metal. but I accepted
its placement on my wrists. shackles of steel
stolen from Hephaestus' forge, where once I
labored, making arrows of light to shatter the
stained-glass windows of mortal illusion. cold
and calculating. feral fear. you do not chain
someone you love. and one day I will be strong
enough to slip these bonds and walk freely among
those who wonder where Orpheus had gone.

Origami pardons

folded paper. the words look right,
but they are merely meeting one another
on the creases that increase our illusion
and confusion. you will never fold the air
and sail on paper airplane wings to my arms.
for by the time your strength returns, if ever
if will, I will have wearied of this game
and turned my face to another star where the paper
remains flat and what is written is read
and acknowledged with an open mind and an open heart.

a prisoner in exile

every mile is a lost prayer. there. another prisoner
will come and I will be left without even the rations
that sour in my hungry heart. inevitability teaches
that the ship that reaches out to me with food
and clothing will one day never come again. for I am but
the placeholder. I am not the prince in an iron mask
you asked for, I am but he who justifies your work
as a turnkey. one day you will find someone not swift
enough or cunning enough to run and then the sun
in the courtyard will be forever lost to me. I see
with the eyes of a child, burned too many times for
crimes imagined but not committed. acquitted of sins
but imprisoned for that which is best in me. not free
to seek better accommodations, for I paid my last ducat
to purchase passage here and here I shall remain until
the stain of my existence is rinsed away by the rains
that fall in a newer season, beyond a prisoner's reason.

there's a bomb in my head

there's a bomb in my head. I found it, picking through
the debris of your last party. artistic wiring I laid
to catch the currents of your passage through my life.
a knifed switch to be thrown when and if you ever truly
come back to rest in my world (if ever). and I will
cast you out to save face. I call the bomb squad to
find the right wires to clip, and hope they will not trip
the primer. the timer ticks inexorably and all you can do
with your little girl voice is ask me not to let you
be hurt by it. shit. and I thought my survival was
at issue. am I the only one left worried about the victim?
am I so tertiary to those I care for that I must do this
all alone? atoning for love with a penance in plutonium?

your hour is up

with practiced spontaneity my confessor/professor and lover
hums her way through my pain. gaining little to recall later
but the knowledge she at least listened to my latest rant.
a chant of dry bones and lonely passion. an honorable man
trapped by his own admissions and sins of omission/commissioned
like a painting. a poem never written. a paramour smitten
but held at arms length while the doctor says she'll be in soon.

a prophet in his cups

at the table in my prison in the city of Angels, I met
a man. a prophet in his cups. he regarded me with eyes
dull and deadly and told me my life. each word rang true
yet, through it all, I could not but hope he had you wrong.
long thoughts later, I cannot be sure. pure reason mocks
the ticking clock, the calculations are imprecise but elegant
if the intent is to tell the tale. the sale of indulgences
for a new religion. a smidgen of half-truths, sold to willing
convert, looking for her way out of her old faith. a wraith
that haunts a distant city. out of pity. out of shame.
calling a name she no longer publicly would use. to choose
to lose what little is left and fall into arms that might
redeem him at her expense. past tense promises never to see
the light of day and grey eyes meeting burnt honey shadows
of a gallows I already hung upon for far too long. the prophet
reminded me that only the brave deserve dessert with their humble pie.

The Seventy-seventh Panther Cycle:
Reflections on a Haploid Heart
(In Response to “DNA Heart”)



“DNA Heart” was a poem she had written about me. Well, maybe about me. On more than one occasion after being told she had said this or written this for me I found out later I was one of many “muses”.

But owing to the timeline and the references contained within it, I will take her at her word and leave it at that.

In this cycle I took seven lines from the poem, seven images, and responded to them. I rather liked the results, I only wish I had the original and the permission to use it...

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

and so today

and so today you lost custody of your heart?
no. it is forever yours, bending to your will
and wishes like branches in a hurricane of thought
and emotion. adrift in an atmospheric ocean.

you offered it to me. fearless. no careless act
of lost purpose or childhood need for validation.
an honest giving, not declined, but we bind ourselves
into the twain. synergizing our energies for tomorrow.

and so today you gained a magnitude of your heart.
forevermore yours, mixed with the best I can produce.
the juice of the fruit of my efforts, squeezed tightly
in unification of two become one. greater than before.

curious fingers

touching tears at a distance.
a tip of the hat you wore to shade
your shoulders and nose from the sun.
curious fingers run across the asphalt
of the human condition. a confession
of eager and idle wildness. a tempest
in a teapot full of jasmine and rose petals.
poured into cupped hands to drink. knuckles
rapping an impatient rhythm on the silver
we see our hands reflected in. protected
in all things by our need to survive. alive
we will make it into an uncertain tomorrow.

A box of blue sky and white clouds

your heart contains the summerday I promised you.
white picket fence. a little girl with chubby
fingers clutching wildflowers picked for her mother.
the smell of dreams. warm and honest. arms around
you and our little girl's little brother. bodies
pressed tightly together to weather all that life is
foolish enough to waste against us. for we have,
on the darkness nights, in the deepest storms, a warm
and gentle place in the box in your heart where you kept me.

Enraptured in the Mystery of it

what feeble detectives we make if we do not forsake
our fears to check the pulse of the body in the hall.
no one saw the fall. but we are caught up in the game.
a foot it is? no, more a metre. pentameter, perhaps.
we lapse into word games while the body grows cold
and we grow old, fretting about how old we are already.
steady to the course we set at random vectors through
the clouds we pumped into the wind. enraptured by the
mystery of it all, we neglect to recall the necessity
that brought us together. a dozen lifetimes unwasted
if we unravel this and get back the kiss wrapped in foil
that foiled us, beneath the mistletoe we missed last
Christmas, worried that we might get what we asked for.

Seared by blue-white Laser Love

I need to be reminded
I've been blinded by your love.
in the interval between flashes
as life trashes
each impulse.
a photon's mass made coherent
through the glass we look at it through.
love.
love.
love.
only a word.
and a destiny for those who can look
at it long enough to forget they are blind.

A single Thread

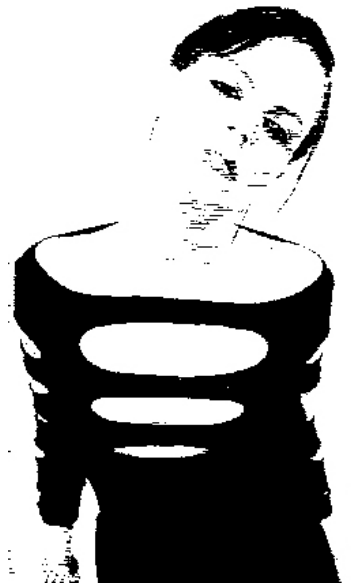
follow the thread.
for I need you to come back to me
before the winds find me
alone and push me out...
out beyond the periphery
of my heart.
to the edge of love.
I cannot fall again,
for I am fragile
with the child of your heart.
cradling her within me
to keep her alive
for another day
another life, perhaps.
but I cannot do it
all alone.
we cannot cut this cord,
and like a fishing line, it only wearies
us to fight...we are barbed, to the end.
my loving friend,
follow the thread.
and find the new life
you want so bad it makes you weep
alone at night, wishing I was there
to hold you until the fear fades
and the child can come out and play.

I hope you don't mind

twice strong this haploid heart beats.
it never retreats.
even on pain of death.
an heroic soul.
a captain worthy of your commission.
order it to live within you
for it is cold out here
without your love
to keep the blood
alive. food
for thought and
dreams for a DNA heart.
for we can only make a haploid heart
between us.
another one or two
would carry the DNA of our merging.
our emerging unity
may yet bring life
beyond our ragged remnants.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Seventy-eighth Panther Cycle: **Dreams of Yesterday**



The fire that burns twice as hot was not just the title of a poem, it was also a statement of defiance.

Defiance against the stagnation and mediocrity of most relationships, where people settle for what they can get and regret what they settled for (been there, done that, own the t-shirt concession at the edge of the cliff at Lover's Leap).

I believed in all that had happened and dreamt of. I had diverted my flight West to Los Angeles to allow myself to meet with her in Tampa. She was the one who hid at the last moment, only emerging long enough to cry over things only made tragic by her reticence.

I had my dreams, and my words. And the tempering they both had provided.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

finding the treasure

spring loaded lock. an idly flipped catch
and suddenly
there you were.
all eyes and lips and legs
and heart and mind and soul
and oh my god
I'm in trouble.
because I never knew
what was waiting for me
in that box. an attack
of the best kind.
a reward for something
I must've inadvertently
done very right
a dozen lifetimes ago.

crossing the Rubicon

three deep breaths.
and a hesitation.
another arch
march into history.
another general
tempted to take the greatest risk
of his life. in the face of odds
and Gods that are laying good money
against him.
but you said
take three deep breaths.
and so I do.
and I win it all.

drawing the line

in the dust and ashes of a recent fire.
desire being cradled, our dreams enabled.
we draw the line around us, a circle
cut in the ice of the fates, making state of our states.

a single point of promise, guarded from folly,
nurtured by us daring to let go of the glaring
weaknesses we know, half truths and bluster.
this lustering gemstone calls us to take the fall.

and so we do, twice. waiting for the winter.
and the spring and the promise of a ring
around hearts and fingers and a song that lingers
long after the closing credits. a fine line drawn.

the fire that burns twice as hot

the fire that burns twice as hot
usually
(note the word)
usually
only burns for half the time.
but if you dare
to take it up a notch
to where gas becomes
nuclear plasma
and the oxidation
becomes fusion
it can last forever.
it is just few have
the courage
to burn so hot
that they blind
the world and
risk annihilating
the universe
with their glory.
for we are mortals and
immortality
frightens us.
so I will wait
in the torus
and see if you show.
for I saw the spark
in your eyes
as you raised your head
and dropped your guard
and held me
in a doorway
in New York.

wheels up in Tampa

last night we had no chance.
the dance was over.
but this morning, there was
a new rise of an ancient sun.
and hope bloomed
in a field in Florida.
and now I face the skies
uncertain, but alive.
knowing there are still
two small hands
and one monumental heart
holding out hope
holding out love
and
holding out for a miracle
as my plane sails West to the Promised Land.

the darkest night

nightmares made mortal.
I will endure.
the fire burns away the flesh
and all that is left
is me.
half a heart remains
and the pains
I pray for do not come.
but I am stronger
than my flesh.
you gave me the power
in a kiss
and an embrace
and a smiling face
that told me who I am
and that
even beyond hope
there is a rope of reason
for my existence.
so I will rise tomorrow
and walk.
not to the gallows.
but the road I swore to you I'd walk.
and we shall see how long
I walk alone.

let it ride

Pascal sold me out. a bad tip. well, I still have the stub
you handed me on an off-chance that this romance
would last beyond a weekend. my friend, I have bet
it all and won a lot and lost a lot and the money pot
is of questionable value right now (not necessarily
low, but I just am not sure what's in it) and all my friends
give good advice to take the money and run. but I am not
sane, by any measure, and I have my eye on the prize.
so I will let this bet ride. and I will win. or go down
in legends they'll tell a thousand years from now.

The Seventy-ninth Panther Cycle: **Static on the Line**



A day before, we had spoken of getting things back on track.

Then, she called. Terse words to communicate a message.

She had “met someone” and wanted to see where it went. The next twenty four hours were the most difficult of my life. I was alone, cut off and cut down.

These are the words and thoughts and images that got me through those hours.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

flavours of rage

cool, like a sprig of mint.
hidden in shadows
to express pain and madness.
hot, like habaneros
roasted in hell...
a well of anger and excess.

both tasted and wasted,
used by the less loving gods
to force us apart. each heart
damaged,
savaged,
ravaged
by pain and our conflicting
paths to the edge of sorrow.

hands that clutch too tightly
and arms that are not there
to make the promised catch.
flesh torn, bones shattered,
tomorrow battered
and fried up to be served
as finger food to the rude
deities without compassion.

near miss in a kiss

you last words were
"don't worry. I love you."
and so I fell.
William Tell
me about the memories
that came for you at midnight.
laughing at your tears.
fears
made mortal.
a portal into hell
I took no pleasure
in taking.
forsaking an old oath
to hide in white washed walls
where no one called.
installed in the fool's palace.
a chalice of venom
offered and rejected.
bloody lips kiss concrete
and the feet
walk away.
walk away.
walk away.

when the power failed

words. only words.
the big goodbye.
a lie I told myself
to keep my voice
steady. ready.
to believe anything.
spring crushed.
giggles hushed forever.
but it was words.
only words.
like these.

walking away

I had to at least try to stand on my own feet and take steps
to leave this disaster. this master plan for my dissolution.
confusion cleared. and I was not the one. better you should
stand alone than settle for a voice on a phone you never loved.
but took shelter under when the rain of self-doubt came pouring
in the windows of your soul. better I should stand alone
than have the doubt of being with someone who could walk away
from all the pretty words. just words. just words. forgotten.

the butterflies

the garden was black and gray and brown. ash and dirt and filth.
nothing of value left. the cleft in the earth where you left your
maul to show even contempt for the gardener. the garden was ravaged.
the gardener fled to hide in the shadows. then bury the dead.

but then came the butterflies. the flowers were all gone and yet
the reds and yellows and blues and greens and golds and violets
all came to dance around my heart and make me feel like life was more
than defeat. and for a season, they sustained me. kept me alive.

pretty things

we all fall for pretty things.
pocket change
for the jukebox
the night you forgot
what you said to me.
the night you didn't care.
the night he touched your hair
and kissed you and suddenly
you were seventeen again
and this was your chance
to go to the big dance
and no longer feel ugly
on the inside.

forced to my knees

I was never forced to my knees
for I am a proud man
and I will hear the bones snap
in my shoulders before you can bring to bear
any hand of man to bring me down.
Humble only before God.
so do your damndest, Fate.
I remember hate now,
the poison you fed me once
a thousand lifetimes ago,
and I will grow strong with this
memory and hear the cartilage
tear from its sockets and wet
the earth with my blood
before I give you an ounce
of satisfaction
in seeing me
forced to my knees.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Eightieth Panther Cycle: **keeping the Dream alive**



Ever see a prizefighter who has been hit from nowhere when he staggers back to his feet, eyes glazed and knees unsteady, trying desperately to hang on, just knowing that if he makes it to the bell he is so far ahead on points the fight will be his?

Yeah, me, too.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

flirting against hope

I told you that you were beautiful
but the mirror was too far away
so I played with your vanity
as long as I could. making good
on every trick and twist and turn
God gave me to remind you of how
it felt too long ago when you
and I were flirting against hope.

the Holy water flows

the tears are sacred.
vagrant and fragrant memories
of pain still healing.
souls still reeling beneath
the tread of the jackboots of life.
I will share them with you one night
and then put them away.
our children will not need them.

a wooden box

small comfort to hold small dreams.
reminders of our love
our hope
our dream
our destiny
if we can raise our eyes
from the wooden box
and see the life that lays
beyond the paper folded
to carry it forth.

buying chairs

every suitor must earn his place.
words alone seem not enough
so I must make way.
buying chairs you make
with talented hands
(as well I know them)
and making plans
to sit in them beside
you for pictures at Christmas
and Thanksgiving
and celebrating a golden Anniversary
if I am a good enough buyer of chairs.

spontaneous affection

I cannot practice my passions.
I must be, in all things, as spontaneous
as the combustion of hypergolic
souls met in a wet chamber.
selling sweet surrender
as a victory and riding
in full retreat to the success
we both have earned and will
raise our banners high above.
words of power. words of love.

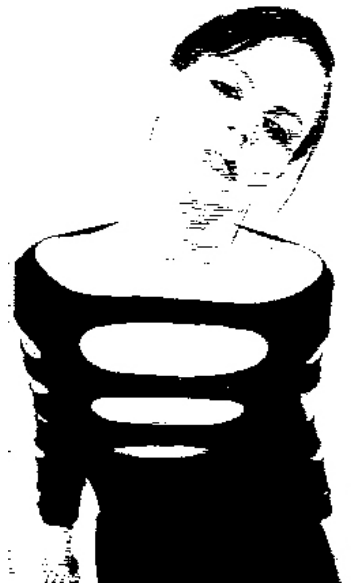
another Thursday

another Thursday has come and gone.
and we yet live.
how is this possible?
I thought all Thursdays were doom
and gloom and lost hearts
and thrown down souls
and bitter draughts of wormwood.
I guess we were wrong.
again.
so, marry me on a Thursday,
and let's break that curse forever.

panthers and poets and promises made

panthers.
and poets.
and promises made.
payment for passion.
dragons all slayed.
kisses.
and cuddles.
and soft serenades.
lullaby back.
for a pillow.
for a life.

The Eighty-first Panther Cycle: **Curves in a world of right angles**



Not only had she left me, she'd left the country. A photo shoot she'd landed as a project. She had decided this would be a great opportunity for her to clear her head and come back ready to fully engage herself in the relationship with this new man in her life.

So, here I was. Destitute, isolated, and bleeding out my heart to the page.

This was actually one of the most creative periods of my life.

Just not the most pleasant.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

tone of voice

how often I have read nuance into your tone of voice.
choosing to believe things unspoken, taking a token
hope and wagering it against all the odds, all the gods
forced on us by friend or foe. or fear. tears wept.
tears kept silent for fear we would be discovered, interred
with our dreams. cold earth. the smell of decay playing
in gentle words. the lilt of laughter when the ever-after
bears no joy. a tell-tale catch when we lie and say all is well.
we give ourselves away and play at the half-lives of our half-lies
and think ourselves surprised when the evidence is evident.

words unspoken

how many words unspoken? too many. but mostly words that once
poured from you in geysers of love and passion, now silent.
a voice unheard in Valhalla for three seasons. words of love
in a voice now pledging the Fifth Amendment. and all the while
the smile of acknowledgment as if I am to know the truth
from three thousand miles away after all the silence. violence
in the words taken away like candy from a child's hands. what
is left but to cry in uncomprehending loss? but you tell me
the candy is still there, I just cannot taste it. I just cannot
see it. I just cannot have it, for now. my inner child
is sometimes dubious...forgive me if I fear, sometimes, the worst.

forgotten moments

more than simple, unadorned words or the orthography of a lover
caught in the web of his own spun sugar veracities. picture
postcard moments that come to me in flashes as a lover trashes
the meaning of love with her actions. moments in your eyes
and in your heart and in your arms and in your body, made paper.
made an old black and white Polaroid, the kind you had to seal
with that foul smelling tube of pink liquid, or it would fade
to nothingness.
to nothingness.
alone came I into this world. and my memories are all I will take.
which makes me richer than any lover with the power to forget.

hesitations

jump
I said.
and we'll be fed
on dreams
and honey
that will recharge
those burnt honey eyes.
and for all the world
we will be safe
from pain
and lies
for we will have
something real.
and she said
let me get back to you.

sleight of tongue

the wrong name.
a cold flame burns
in the face of this straw dog.
unconsumed.
but assumed
to linger
as a light
where I had long hoped
only my ruby-blue taper
would ever again be seen.
redshift to green.

loneliness

there is nobility in pain.
a purification
that will remain
long after the suffering.
as long as it is
not self-inflicted.
mutilating oneself
is not a sign of greatness.

the power of self-deception

we can talk ourselves into anything, you know.
I am always afraid to not be there when you need
to find a new world. just as you fear that in me.
free to float on concepts we wrote on tabla rasa hearts
we hid for a season for a reason that only make sense
to ourselves and friends who, out of friendship, would
agree with anything we say. playing the fool in front
of the Library at Alexandria, limitless knowledge we
would rather not read, for we plead ignorance to escape
the subtle rape of sorrow. tomorrow there will be truths
if we can break the cycle. the evil of the power that
corrupts us. the power of self-deception.

The Eighty-second Panther Cycle: **definitions of love**



The poet turns philosopher, healing himself with the hot iron of intellect and reason, layered as a poultice on the deepest wounds he has known.

That's the size of it, the scale of it, the temperature of it all.

Pain does one of two things to you.

It breaks you.

Or it makes you over. I was determined to be transfigured in my pain, so I wrote, I wrote until my hands cramped and my back ached and my voice broke and my eyes could not see the page and I would then write inside of myself, to be read later like cave paintings when I would dare to go back into those spaces I spent these days wandering.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

between mortal soul and God

an exchange of affections so one sided. mortal soul
can never measure up to the purity and focus of love
given of God. selfless. timeless. without exception
or qualification. through joy and sorrow. today. tomorrow.
forevermore given, taken, and returned in slight measure.
but we do what we can and seek a more perfect union.

between mortal soul and self

if God judges you worthy of His love
and can you not love yourself. I do not
mean to always like yourself, there is a
wealth of reasons to feel unworthy of respect.
but, direct not your thoughts against
the value you intrinsically hold in the universe.
there is always some meat to the marrow.
and victory if you look at the defeat
and the lessons of each sorrow.

between woman and man

it took me nearly forty years to find love
like I had always wanted to taste. Forty years
playing Moses in a wasteland of near misses
and conditional kisses that taught me only
the flavour of frustration and the silence
of lost inspiration. Then I found love. I had
long since surrendered my quest. But the jest
of life is that when all hope is given over,
the fates wake up and smack you hard and happy.
Playful like a child running after butterflies.
And so I found love. Not an easy task in this
graceless age. I pray she found it too. For in
the liberation of this discovery, I found a need
and a want and a passion and a prayer that I
need fulfilled. I cannot go back into the coffin
where I lay for so long, my heart warm but not
afire. The darkness stifling. Maggots rifling
the pockets of my dreams. But to hold her, even
once again before I die, would be a miracle that
transcends the shooting star I saw this morning.
Tears stain my face as I write these words. But not
in sorrow, in pent-up emotion an ocean of roads
untraveled cannot crush. A sound in my heart
like a choir, you cannot hush this with the quiet
desperation of mortal failure. Deific dreams.
Dreams of love and tenderness and unity. Eternal.

between two bodies (a response)

I am held to your orbit.
I only make your tides
and give some glow of light
reflected.
I do not shine of my own,
but in albedo-measured
mirroring
of hope.
For you are my sun and my earth.
mother of life.
and you hold me forever
in an orbit about you
so that you may look on
my face, forever waxing and waning,
period set by your
coming and going from my life.

between legends

larger than life.
like some story told to children
to warn them of the dangers
of falling in love.
and the joy of falling in love.
and the power of falling in love.
and the children will only remember
that we are remembered
because we fell in love.
and damn the details.

between the sheets

purring like cats at play.
forget the day and stay
with me now. here.
the sun can be hidden
and we can take our leave when
we choose. I cannot lose
you again to the clock or the calendar.
I should have stayed in New York.
or left with you in Virginia.
I know this now.
but for now, we are
again,
unified in purpose.
in pleasure.
a treasure a measure a hormonal seizure
of coruscating fire that flows
ably between us like Moses
parting the Red Sea.
so I can cross to the
Promised Land.

between parent and child

she came to me in darkest nights
and told me not to worry.
that soon enough you and her would meet
and sweet affections
would be consummated.
I still believe in her.
a remarkable child
for a remarkable mother,
who will cherish her
as a person.
a child of her heart
of her womb
of her love.
evidence of dreams
and the courage to live them
to live them all.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Eighty-third Panther Cycle: **the prices of love**



Love doesn't ask anything.

But the lover gives it anyway, because they know it is priceless and deserving of sacrifice.

Here I was trying to express not just what all I had given up to pursue love, but also what everyone and anyone who wished to consider themselves a lover should be willing to do.

"Words from a well meaning friend" was about my old friend Larry Jaffe, a poet of note and a real friend when the chips are down. He warned me that the Panther would be back and that I would be a fool to let her back into my life. He warned me that she could not love as I did and needed to be loved and that it was painful to see her do that to me and me do that to myself.

Of course, when she called one bleak Thursday, to tell me her new boyfriend had dumped her while she was overseas, I didn't listen.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

surrendering possessions

without regret I have given over all I had. definitions
by the trappings surrendered without doubt. turning inside out
the metaphors of all the whores of the heart who pay prices
for the ices of October that melt in the early spring. rings
of gold and crystalline coal making whole their hollow hearts.
I would give you the pretty things in their own season, not for reason
to impress you. I hope you are not a woman to be bought, but caught
in her own heart's web. if I have judged wrong, at least I have
purified myself of the barnacles of a former life to find a wife
among the worthy hearts, few that they are, living on the art
of life, not the life of art. I have started down the road we chose
and now the third rose draws its sustenance from my veins, my pains
to start a new world, ordered after your image. a new stage
on which you may command the forces of love beyond any you dared
imagine as a child. a universe of possibilities beyond merely
objects. people and places and the mind races to the edge of God.

Pascal's wager on a line of credit

I took the money down. plastic issued
for tears tissue
one long fearful time in the sun's coast.
toasting travesties
with gravities and pained jests.
a plundered chest of riches
that hitches a star to
Cassiopeia and beyond.
the payments are small and there is no
interest called or taken.
profit forsaken for sake
of your heart, healing
and reeling and stealing
precious glimpses
at the bottom line
you so much want to pay.

losing self

I am never afraid of losing myself in your love.
for you are a strong woman, given to principles
that differ from mine. and the wine you drink
is of a different vintage than I would choose,
if I drank wine. you are a worthy partner,
daughter of dreams I held close decades ago
and gave up when love seemed impossible. you
may absorb me in moments of my pain, so I may hide
inside you and grow strong and peaceful in your care.
I dare to give all I am to the all I can be because
of you and the true nature of our souls. so come
for me, when you can, and this man will surrender.
without fear.

losing sanity

there is nothing I fear more than losing my mind.
but I find that you can steal it from me in those moments
when I misplace my dreams under a plastic slipcover
in the main hall of souls. when I forget where we are
and where we are going and what it all will mean one day -
I am lost. tossed from madness to concession to those
who would treat love as something you treat with needles
and chemicals and a long session on the couch. ouch.

words from a well-meaning friend

so much for that friendship. for a friendship
based on anything other than love and concern
is doomed to eventually be a canker we recall ruefully
one day as that which kept us from happiness.
we bless ourselves ten thousand times when we
well consider the rationale and reason for keeping
people close to us. to nurture us to our future,
not hold us in their orbits so that they may feel
superior and protected. and even the best of friends
is not you or me. they cannot see with the eyes
we possess. so, in the end, it is pity that keeps them
worth our while. we charitably allow them the illusion
of equality as we just shake heads and make our beds, ourselves.

springboard to ecstasy

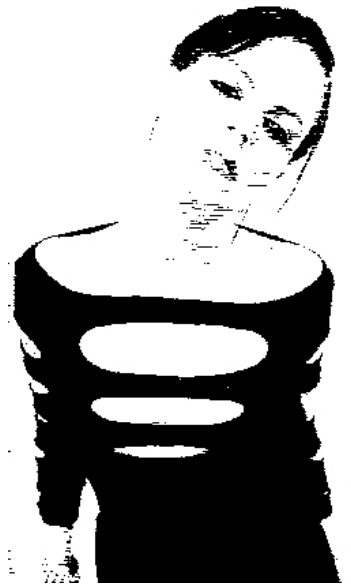
you said it. that word. I heard it plainly. love.
not just as an adjective, but as a verb. you disturb
me so often with your tight-lipped approach after all
the blessed promises. I understand the need, but I bleed
sometimes to hear you say you love me. even when I listen
with my heart, I still need the words. for I have leapt
from a great height and am ready to bounce into clouds
of proud exaltation to seize the ecstasy you can bring
in the spring of my existence. any day now. rigid words
on which to bounce high and far and with wings unfurling.

releasing the butterflies

my hands open
and I release
the butterflies.
I thank them for
their gentle time,
but tell them the panther
is back in the
garden and I
must get to work rebuilding.
the picket fence
needs a new coat
of white paint and I smile.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Eighty-fourth Panther Cycle: **expressions of love**



“But still, it was good he’d loved.”

What a great statement. That love is good for its own sake. That love is ennobling and inspiring and uplifting.

I was learning things about myself and the world I had not imagined.

I was finding the path. Not by pain or ordeal, but by love and purpose.

You can’t be right for yourself if you can’t be right for someone else. It is in our natures to love and be loved. We need it like air and water and food.

No. We need it more.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

opus 574: the need to love

We, as mortals, cannot choose to love. It is thrust upon us like greatness and folly. The quintessence and dust of our being. Falling on words like swords raised to prick us to our depths. Like air. Like water. Like God. Sick is the soul held away from love. Dead is the heart held too far from the source of all beauty. The duty of the few gifted to love with understanding is to express it as art in their pictures and words and lives. The knives of trust carve away the irrelevancies of our fears, like a feeble pie crust that only interferes with the savouring of the meringue of life.

opus 575: tears at 4 am

you awaken to the touch. not of my hands or face, but the subtle cool of tears dripping softly on your soft and feline back. you do not move, marveling at the depth of love required to bring such tears of joy. pondering your worthiness. at length you turn and take me in arms so warm and honest. like coming home to die. safe and strong and forever there. staring into eyes ripe with the light reflected off the saline jewels of a crown of thorns worn just to prove my value, my steadfastness. the integrity of my suit for your affection. and your love is so beautiful.

opus 576: all that I have is yours

My Panther. I have traveled far and given over
to others all but the barest essence of myself
that I may be with you. All that remains remembers
all there is, that I have not found, how skillfully
I may search, another soul that fits so well
within the curve of my heart. A single silicon
thread wove us together. Within this simple shell
I live, worn to the nub, but pledged to stand on,
on beyond the fall of all there is, to serve this grace
I found the first time God was merciful and let me see your face.

opus 577: legends in the window

I cannot make an Empress of an unworthy, or force
the course of an unwilling flood to turn against the tide.
Yet, inside of you beats the heart of gold. I have told
no less than the gospel of my heart. Godspeed my words
that you may yet read them, heed them and need me before
I kiss the floor in final fall. Legs locked to not bend
knee, that all who live will bear witness that I loved
you as a man should love his paramour. Bravely and beyond
the call of simple passion. Fashioning a glass through which
the legends, legends born of nature not fabrication, may be
viewed long after your final kiss is given and my soul
fades into the winds that shall blow at the end of all things.

opus 578: walking the road, in patience

I walk the road alone, listening for your catwalk.
Kick off the leaden sandals and dance on the smooth stones,
swiftly and with joy. I will guard my oaths to you
forever. Tethered by the nature of the beast, to serve
as companion and friend and lover and mate to but one.

opus 579: giggles on the phone

I miss the flirtations of naughty thoughts caught
in the web of your voice. Carried with pride and
the stride of an arrogant strut. Cutting through
my emancipated civilization to the basic animal
lust you raise from me, free to melt with your
delight into a rose-scented night, penetrating
the fogs of forgetfulness and blessing us with
pleasure and treasure beyond the leisure of measure.

opus 580: the black lace wings

I need your courage.
I need you to summon your nature
and grow the black lace wings
required to meet me.
Time and pain
have beat me down,
but I have yet wind enough
to fly
before I die
if the sky
is not hollow.
And I will swallow the sun
to hide your shame
if my name
is not good enough
to be carried
in your legend.
But I need your courage.
It is more than your turn
to follow.
It is your turn to carry.
If you wish my love,
pronounce it to the world
with joy and evocation.
For I give it simply,
and with joy.
Awakening the parson souls
of all the universe
who sigh in delight
at my every poetic kiss.
Amotations they wish
they had for themselves.
Meet me in the stars
and let us make a legend.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Or I shall make mine alone
that when I am gone
they may say...
there was a man
who knew love
and touched it
with bare hands.
A shame he never
felt it touching back.
But still,
it is good he loved.
Nonetheless.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Eighty-fifth Panther Cycle: **Needing a Legend**



In the aftermath of our latest reconciliation it was decided we would see each other again, that she would come to Los Angeles and we would be together again and work out all the pain and confusion.

I felt, I honestly felt, that a part of the problem was her inability to walk the path she had so openly wanted me to blaze for her, a trail of legend.

But, I have found myself that one of our greatest fears as humans is the transcendence of our roles into something more than mortal.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

a panther in the light

Elegant and graceful. A trace of sadness,
a trace of madness. But an eloquent picture
of life and love. My life. My love. The focus
of an artists ambitions. Dancing for time.
Time wasted on memories tasted too long ago.
She has made me immortal and all I can do
is sell my life for the legacy she gave me.
Love. And hope. And joy. And delight beyond words.

oracles

the oracles keep coming
at me.
seeing things
I believe in.
and reminding me
that just because
my voice is not always
heard, it does not mean
I am not right
in my visions.
provisions
for fulfillment
made in a moment
of bold and decisive need.
bleeding to death
on a cowards field
of a thousand hesitations
broken in a last ditch
try to make the prophets
right.
tonight.
before tomorrow's doom.

I believe in the dream

I believe in the dream we lived
three times already.
love between two mortals destined
for immortality.
choosing between a legacy of rapture
and suffering.
losing nothing but time, time to be
deeply loving
one another. at close range.
fearless.
a chance to win it all. a prayer we
can bless.

touching you

I want to touch you again. not just as a friend,
but as the lover you once embraced. shyly and slyly.
hands and fingertips and lips and eyes. no secrets
no shame. a name blurred to unity between poets
in love. lovers kissing with dams bursting. thirsting
for a familiar wine. a taste of one another, hungry
for renewal. fuel for a fire within. without which we die.

coals rekindled

not a new start, but a restart. a heart split and shared
between lovers kept apart by necessity, now unified
in a suspension of disbelief. no grief for lost moments.
joy for the return of the rightful passions. panther's pride.

you will know me

you will know me, when you see me, by the love in my eyes.
unfaded by time or distance. persistence being a new virtue
to me, but the core essence of my love for you, unvanishing
and unvanquished. I will build my life for you from this day on.

you will know me, when you hear me, by the love in my voice.
choices made are totem to the carver of time. hearts so true
and yet so fragile need each other to guard their backs,
back to the edge of the precipice where we damn near fell last.

you will know me, when you touch me, by the love in my embrace,
all trace of doubt held away and dropped like lost pennies
to the floor of the world, the moment you dare take me again
in a regaining of your presence in my world. oh, the love I hold.

you will know me, when you love me, by the love in my surrender.
remembering moments of joy and pleasure, and making new
memories to reflect upon over the years we are destined to share,
to stare dead in the face and laugh at, mad with feral joy and relief.

let me be your helpmeet

Let me be your helpmeet when the road goes on too long and the light fades. I would die in your grace, so I would face the darkest night with you. I will not turn an angry word or venomous thought against you for, although I am mortal, my love is for you. Lauri, I danced the nights away with only dreams of you and I, as it should be, exiled for a season while wounds were licked and fantasies pricked that we could live apart. But there is gain in my surrender, before the wild and pitiless creatures at the gates of hell come for me to free me of the sanity I would share with your for the rest of my days. I promise you two arms to hold you, two hands to carry your dreams, one heart to be shared with earnest faith, one soul to melt with in the dream of an afterlife, and one mind to labour alongside you to make our lives as rich and full and remarkable as mortals can hope for. All I ask for task in return is your love. It is a great request, but I am a man of great destiny, and I want my legacy to be one of hope and joy, not pain and sorrow and loss. And you are the fulcrum of my history, there is no mystery to that. You yourself revealed this elegant if terrifying truth to me a long, long season ago, when we were both in better shape to drape our laurels on our legions of talents and march without hesitation to the gates of tomorrow. I am here for you now. And will stand my oath until the day I die, for there is no one, and nothing, I crave more of this earth than that we be reunited in the love we have seen and felt between us.

The Eighty-sixth Panther Cycle: **Echoes in the City of Angels**



At the risk of sounding like Randy Newman, I love LA.

I moved there in the aftermath of my divorce, stopping briefly in Tampa to meet with the Panther, who spoke at length of long term plans for us. There's a complicated psycho-history in this, and it would not be fair of me to discuss where she came from, but I understand what it had done to her.

So, here I am in LA, not that long ago having gotten a promise from the Panther that in the next few months she'd be moving to LA and we'd be together, as a prelude to marriage. Her words, her oath.

But as I felt that all slipping away, I wrote of LA in the milieu of our relationship, in part to express how I felt about the city, and in part to keep her focused on the goal.

Two more interesting bits here: The high desert in the Morongo Valley, and what I called the Topanga Run.

I love the heat and wind of the Morongo Valley...if I won the lottery tomorrow, I would build a house there. I feel strong when the Santa Ana Winds come, strong and reborn.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Now for the “Topanga Run”. Early in my time in LA I noticed I wasn’t always paying attention to little things around me, like oncoming traffic. I had several near misses. One Saturday night I was on Topanga Canyon Boulevard in the Valley and decided I’d see how much of my survival instinct was intact. I pointed “Clemmie”, my 1974 Alfa Romeo GTV, towards the Pacific Ocean and raced down the miles of winding canyon roads to the coast.

It was insane, illegal, and exhilarating. And by the time I reached the ocean, I had my answer. I wanted to live. I repeated the Topanga Run a few times after that, when the isolation from the rest of the world became too much for me. I never wrecked, never missed a turn, never sideswiped a pedestrian and never got a ticket.

Sunrise over the Desert

The heat reminds me of your embrace. Warm and passionate.
A thing of nature, perhaps too intense for most, but this ghost
of a man is braced for it. All his life staring into a rising
sun to come from the East, released from the shackles of the night
to bite hard on his own lips, dry with thirst and cursed
with a quest to find the horizon among the infinite mirages.
You are that sun. Beautiful and necessary. The heat is sometimes
too much to bear, but I will be there, every morning that you
dare to rise over the horizon...awaiting the warmth of your love.

The Promenade at Third Street

Like your mind, my love, ever aswirl with a thousand colours
and sounds, bounding over barriers of imagined limitations to
crack open the wallets of the hearts of all the suitors. Pewter
and silver, glass and ancient books, the movie star and the homeless
man who sings gospel songs like he knows God personally, all alive
and milling about. Seeming sometimes so chaotic there must be no
purpose. But you and I both know it is proof of life and the beauty
of the myriad hues of existence. Never drab, never boring, soaring
like a dragonfly with sheathed claws of a panther, darting through
my senses to breach my stonewall defenses and batter them, shatter
them even in the darkest, starkest glooms I can summon from hell.

The Santa Monica Mountains

Rising over the crest we test our capacity to gasp
in wonderment, grasping at wordstraws that slip through
our fingers like hands clutched the last moment before you
board a plane that steals you from me. A sea of shimmering
lights that glow like the stars you placed from your heart
into mine, giving life to me when I was but nosferatu.

The Waves at Malibu

Thundering down. Blue to white. Foaming with fury and salty
like the tears I have too often drawn from your face, your heart
cracked with sadness brought by distance, fought with words
like these. I would ride the swells of your heart, darting
on each crest with the best of the dream surfers. Finding
the angle and following it down. down. down. until the crashes
in a consummated roar, splashing me with a sense of life and love.

A Panther in the City

A new jungle awaits her.
Dangers, strangers and strange creatures
that cartwheel through space on celluloid
ribbons. Images yet to be painted with words
she will put in the mouths of celebrated
men and women and children. A puppeteer
for the heart. A part of the pulsing coil
of this universe in a Southern California
bottle of glass and brass and grass watered
daily to hide the desert. Like telling someone
you love them, everyday, so the sands will not
reclaim the desolations of the past.

Walking the Beach in Venice

I would walk the beach with you,
as the sand flows around our toes and makes a faint
grunting sound as we pad across it,
both of us thinking sly thoughts
of sand angels, but neither
one daring to say it first.
Your soul is like this vista.
Pacific serenity surrounds you,
masking the turmoils within.
The sands of time piling on the beach,
out of reach once they have
made it to shore.
So I will swim to the horizon
to buy back lost moments.

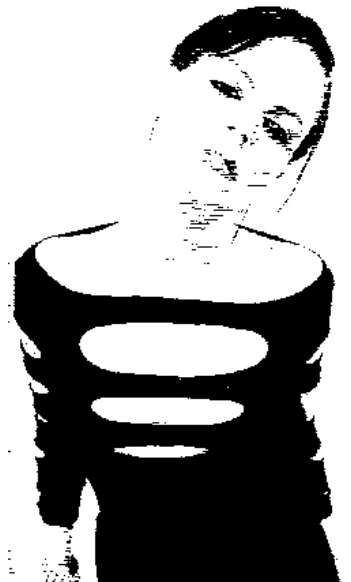
The Roads in the Canyon

I admit I drive them faster than I should, venting
my angers in a manner that only endangers me. Gaining
back the sense of immortality I lost when I realized
that words alone were not enough to win your love.
Your heart is like those canyon roads....blind curves
and suddenly rises, exciting and dangerous. Stealing
the strength from my limbs, but testing me. Perhaps
besting me one day when I finally let go the wheel
and take that slow motion arc over the lip, down into
the rocks to be made legend and enigma in your memory.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Eighty-seventh Panther Cycle:

A new rainbow



I brought back the spectrum concept in this cycle, playing with variations in colour to develop the metaphors and imagery. A trifle of a cycle, to be sure, but with moments of interest.

Almost all are worthy Valentine's Day poems, brief expressions of a moment or a feeling. That there is no deep, insightful revelation tells you two things: I wasn't in the mood to reveal anything truly deep and I was emotionally drained.

When I am worn out, depression sets in and my self-defense mechanisms kick in...I start writing light romantic works, works designed to lift my spirits and invoke in me feelings of peace and happiness.

Yes, I know it should work the other way, but I need to either be in a total pit of despair or feeling very anchored to write something like "TRIUMPH" or "Diogenes"...and this was not the case. I was exhausted, but game.

And these seven poems are a reflection of where I wanted to go with renewed energies.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Rose

Evocative and provocative, the colour you flushed,
you blushed, the first time I saw you. Heart ready
to leap from slippery stone to slippery stone to ford
the rivers of time and embrace me without a trace
of doubt. Ready for love, ripe as a rosebud ready
to unfurl its petals to my touch, ready to release
the shouted fragrance of love in bloom to a silent
world just praying for a worthy song to be sung.

Apricot

Rich and golden. Sold on point of hungry hearts. Parts
harvested to wait on the ripening. Wiping away tears
that now are those of joy. Rebirth, and a new awareness
of the worth of two hearts made one and raised a level
of magnitude by passion and purpose and the pleasure
of a succulent kiss of your dark apricot heart, purring
like a kitten, curing you and I of so many haunting
memories, taunting us until we fall out of sight in the
orchards we have planted in our own ways for the coming days.

Sunshine

Kiss me quick while the sun is out and the gold flickers
like a hummingbird's colours in the garden of the awakening
jungle cat. A totem for a woman who in and of herself is
worthy of all love and cherishment. Perish the darkness
in the explosion of yellow light that knives through grey
clouds and illuminates the dreams of the dreamers. The themes
of the poets ripening in the sunshine of your love. The light
proves that we are not the nosferatu we feared, we live and give
off sparks that will ignite the hearts of all who dare to love
as we dare to love, in the light of every day that remains.

Celery

Crisp and cool.
A brisk taste of life
in your laugh,
like celery snapping
between your teeth
as you wrench it free
and savour the flavour.

Azure

In the sky I will dance you a pirouette.
No sweat for a poet,
wet with the dew of tomorrow,
wet as a proper brownie,
but sweeter still if you will laugh
for me, craft for me your desire
that I may pray with you in the night
that the day comes swiftly when
larger dreams catch us as we earn
our way to play in fields we once
considered pieces of an untouchable
sky, gathered in a word basket
and baked into bright blue loaves that
taste like your kisses.

Midnight blue

I surrender to you all I am.
a mortal, a minstrel, a man.
and would melt in the dark
into half of the life in the world
we share nightly, brightly beneath
comforters my grandmother made
for just such an occasion.
Take from me all your sensual delight,
purple and fine linen fantasies
wrapped around your elegant
form to warm my dreams and
give me the tenderness I cannot
find in my own heart, for I gave
it away to you for a dream.
A gift I will never regret giving.
A love I will never regret living.

Lavender

The fragrant, vagrant bliss
of this dark kiss. So long
in coming.
Again and again.
Shall it never end,
my loving friend?
Not if you want it not
to terminate. For I will
fill your life with all
you dare take from me,
and when you wake with me,
ask for another kiss.

The Eighty-eighth Panther Cycle **travesties and injustice**



A vague attempt at standing, but all in all a pretty shocking display of self-pity is this cycle. I felt betrayed by the very essence of love, as if I had followed the directions as best I could and still found myself shut out of the promised land.

I think it had to do with expectations.

Doing the “right” thing does not always mean things will come out smoothly for you (ask Horatius sometime). Indeed, I have found that when I am doing my best to be “good” and “noble” is generally when others take advantage of me.

But you know what? I won’t change. Not because I can’t...but because it would be wrong of me to do so, it would be turning my back on strongly held beliefs. Core beliefs and values.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Years ago, when working as a project manager for a major consulting firm, I put in my status report every week that we were not getting the laptop computers we were promised to help our productivity. This went on for months. Finally, the office manager told me I might as well drop it, as the phase where they would have been of the most use was past, and we weren't going to get them. So I "went along" and dropped the line. Three months later, I got roasted alive by upper management for that...they said that having quit mentioning it made it seem like there hadn't been a problem to begin with.

The lesson? Stick to your guns. If you believe, don't back down. I believed in this love, and it cost me just about everything, that belief. And there were times I felt terribly alone and betrayed, because I had depended on the words, the promises, of another and the notion that we all get what we really, really want.

parking our hearts

these are the dreams of which we are spun
in battles fought and battles won
in pyrrhic and phallic images...
tainted and sainted
by the fall of rose petals
from small and tender hands.
pretender, not defender...
a sweet kiss that misses
the mark
parking our hearts
in an orbit of an obit
a piece at a time.
crime.
bury me where the daffodils
were trampled.

cutting corners

cutting corners on a round heart.
starting a Moebius loop,
hoop skirts and ghetto blasters...
masters and mistresses...
who am I to argue
with your well worn platitudes,
your feeble attitude.
indefensible.
suspendible
on a gossamer
thread
a bed where you bled
but not for me.
not anymore.

ratchet

tightening the screws
with a ratchet
that clicks with each
fading charade.
paraded
by my face in disgrace.
trace my hand on yours
and forget me to the forget-me-nots.
for I am gone.
on
beyond
the event horizon.

self pity

I only wanted to love you.
but you couldn't take that dare.
fair game to the travesties.
humiliation of the memories.

token totems

I sold my soul for the love
you said we shared. cared
to throw into the face of our critics.
cynics and hypocrites
who fed you venom while
calling me poison. reason
to doubt. cause to shout
challenges from atop
the silken webs we slip silently
under ourselves as we fall.
predator unleashed and mad.

no kisses for the damned

passion fading in a parade of fractured homilies.
freezing rain of saline and satiety insane. pain
woven into a multi-coloured coat to float
our dreams upon in a sea of illusions inherited,
ferreted out like blood under a bloodhound's nose.
the clothes we wore recycled for the next lover.

farewell to love

alone

I have shone my light

brightly. a beacon

to love delayed, not denied.

pride keeping me standing longer

and stronger than anticipated.

and when the bard dragon fell

a well

to hell

opened in the heart of the world.

The Eighty-ninth Panther Cycle:

seven words



A very abstract cycle, held together solely by the “seven words” concept, but with some profundity in it, nevertheless.

In fact, sometimes when unconstrained by the very limits of thematic cycles, this is where we find the diamonds.

“Without bravery life is slavery” is one line that sticks out, for instance.

And the poem “Honesty” is about her confessing to me that she had been having one night stands. I was not happy to hear this, as this was in the middle of her swearing to stick with me for the rest of her life, but at least she had the integrity to tell me about it to my face.

Of course, her practically starting her visit with me in Los Angeles with that confession just put the whole weekend on sloppy footing and pretty much damned our attempts to reconnect.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

shekels

coins of the realm
helm of the galleon fleet.
sweet to the taste.
wasted, in false memory.
love traded for a moment
in the arms of the idols
of wood with hammered
golden skins and eyes of jade.

patience

what you demand, you command.
my heart...part and parcel of my being.
seeing you with electric eyes that lie
about nothing. taking the winds to bear
us to the East. feasting on the bones
we place our trust in, we place our dust
in bowls of clay...bought in a market
so far away we cannot remember
much further from the tree where we fell.

passion

the fury of release.
pleasure, most treasured in measures
of flesh and filaments of silk.
milking our souls for every drop of the coal
black fluids of our consciences.
remember me to the edge of time
and I am certain we will find
no more memories worth
forgetting. setting our course
for a new horizon, you and I.

honesty

You didn't have to tell me all you told me.
But you did, and your little girl cringe
told me all I needed to know. Guilt like
silt washed down a river of self-deception
until you could not live with the sediment
blocking the harbors of your heart. Starting
for home. But not knowing the way there
because you cannot swear you've ever had
a place like home within your heart.

silence

the violence of dreams.
it seems like we are throttled by our pains,
what remains mottles us in reds and a strange
colour not unlike burnt honey. money spent,
every last cent, to buy an echo for the Greek
chorus to ignore us in. listening to it all.
christening the world a new beginning.

courage

without bravery,
life is slavery
to misbegotten doubts.
shouts of pain and the stain
of memory we would as soon forget,
wet and bloody on the brow
of our idols.

trust

how can I not offer a trusting heart to the thrusting dart
of cupid's bow. toe to toe with the archers of our most arch
attitudes. platitudes do not precede us into the pit if, with wit,
we parry the blows and open our hearts and minds and eyes
and souls and cry with tears of reconciliation our exoneration.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Ninetieth Panther Cycle:

close, away



I have been told “she asked my name” was an attempt on my part to make the Panther jealous.

Bull.

The truth was what is reported in the poem...I encountered a young woman whom, in many ways, reminded me of the Panther, and we spoke for a while, and we went our separate ways. Although by this time the dysfunctional nature of our relationship had lead me to date others (even as she was, by her own admission, “sleeping around”) I was not really emotionally available, and I don’t engage in sex as a sport, too much dynamite in that cap gun.

These poems largely summoned my sense of physical isolation and emotional intimacy that marked this stage of our relationship.

Yeah, I know. Barking mad. But my madness, and that madness, I honestly believe, was becoming an addiction to provide emotional fuel for both my writing and to help me survive the crushing losses I had endured for this woman, my Panther.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

Here I was, three thousand miles from my children, almost as far from any other living relative. Those friends that had not turned their backs on me were a continent away.

I had signed away all the money I had earned in this life to buy my freedom, and here I was...alone, all but penniless, and easy prey for the emotional vultures.

I wear, as a badge of honor, the very fact that I survived at all.

close, away

I cannot stay so close, away
and so I make my excuses
and exit through the window
you left broken behind you,
stained glass on which I cut myself,
blood falling like rose petals on a lover's bed.

closure over a cup of Jasmine tea

I stopped at Anastasia's.
they did not have jasmine tea
on the menu, so I asked rather
than settle for what was offered.
I tasked the fates for their sufferance
and was rewarded with closure
in a cup of memory I bled
tears into. a drink I will never taste again.

alone in the corner

alone in the corner
I dare, not to mourn her
lest she think me the fool
for being the one to whom the rule
of the heart and spirit matter
more than needs held transient, higher
than a heaven she doesn't believe in today,
but where she has taken my tickets to, anyway.

somewhere else

I am supposed to be somewhere else tonight.
but the invitation got lost in the mail or sight
failed me when fate rollerbladed by to throw
candy kisses from her fanny pack on the snow
you left behind like pieces of a poet's heart.

line of sight

out of sight
out of mind
in the night
all I find
are faded imitations
of the real thing, guns
hired for uninspired kisses.

not in this life

not in this life
will I love with such honest intensity,
a propensity to walk away from all else
for the love of a solitary heart.
forever trying to prove a point
on the edge of elegant elegies
of other loves and lovers cast away
so you can play with your favourite toy.

she asked my name

she asked my name as she sat down.
hair of gold, eyes of brown.
and yet I saw in her another
of transposed demeanor, lonely unto pain.
and so I did not follow when she called
but spoke with her, at length.
hearing tears in every laugh and explaining
her proposition was no gaffe.
but I cannot, will not be as others
and use a wounded soul to my ends.
and we parted, that night, not as lovers,
but, in your name, as newfound friends.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

The Ninety-first Panther Cycle: **precious**



One of the few later cycles that actually addresses a real world point of reference, as I had long since descended into abstractions.

During the rather bizarre visit she had made to me in Los Angeles, we vacillated between breaking up and making up. Vacillated is a soft word. We were all over the emotional map.

At one point during her tour we found ourselves at the overlook at Stony Point, and as we looked out over the land, she started saying those things again that had held me in her orbit for so long, dreams of a house and children and us being together forever, making poetry and art and love.

Another invocation is of our first face to face meeting in New York, where a surprising large slice of the conversation revolved around our waiter's seeming inability to provide lime instead of lemon with a soda. The little things cling to us, to help us remember the larger vistas.

You can see in some of the works a strong sense of looking into the void, to what my life would be like after she walked away, but for the moment I clung to the illusion.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

fading images

the pain, the stain, all fade with time.
time spent warm and safe in an embrace
impossible to define and deny. try as we may,
we are made better by the love shared,
dared on the high wire of life, not waiting
for a sign or permission from those
who have never felt this way and,
like so many others, probably never will.

I never knew I had this strength

for you I have endured impossible things.
rings removed, miles conquered,
sorrows endured, all for the love
of you. no truer test of a dream
woven for your joy. make of me
a martyr, and I will only be magnified
in the saying of the sooth. truth
is the strongest suit in the house
of cards you weathered the storms
in, alone. release your ravens to the wind
and begin to weave a better tapestry
as I have seen you capable of, looking
into the firestorms with eyes cauterized
but content in the love you have given me.

flickering images

the reception is not always good during the storm
and we must contend with static and snow
that goes too far in hiding from us the scenes
we need to hold on, fold in to our emotional
libraries of memories worth embracing.
the truths spoken at Stony Point, when walls
fell for need of an honest embrace we could
not face tomorrow without. an epiphany
in which we both forgave all and yesterday
became but a flickering image before
the cable-ready sunrise of tomorrow's possibilities.

no choice

there is no choice for me but to love you.
love you.
love you with a fire and a frozen dream
you gave to me with your first smile,
drawing your glasses from your face
across a restaurant where the waiter
could not seem to understand the subtle
difference between a lemon and a lime.
but we understood the polar positions
that separate what we are from anything
else we have experienced. I have no choice
but to love you until...
there are no "untils" in such a love. no
conditions to be met for it to exist,
conditions for the pain to fade, but
that is for us to deal with if we would
be anything more than miserable.
and I have my dreams, if not my choice.
but were I to choose, I would but love
you more and better and sooner.

a kiss buys eternity

hold for me that moment.
locked in satin hands
and the electric, eclectic warmth
of your lips made mother to my passions.
take from me my awareness
of anything else in this universe...
for I have not found delight
so perfect, as in your arms.
your hands, your body, your thoughts.

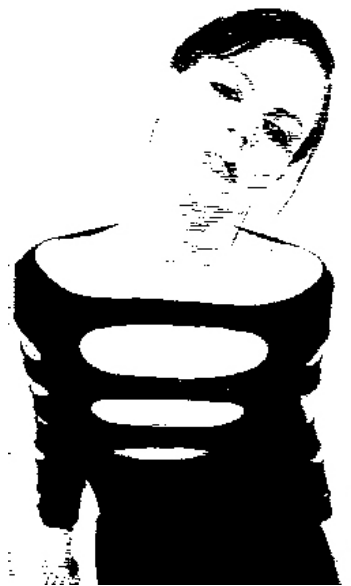
I need you

I know you do not like to feel needed.
it places a sense of obligation on you.
and you hate feeling like you owe anyone
anything.
but when I speak of need, I mean desire
so intense that I am unwilling to accept
a future without its fulfillment.
so, I am sorry if past parasites have
made you unhappy.
played you badly.
but I am not anyone else.
and I need to know your love in my life.

walking away

one day, perhaps,
one of us will need to walk away.
as we have already done so many times before.
ignoring words spoken, promises made and broken
a thousand times in our complexities
and our loneliness. I will not easily
take the solitary road. but if and when
you convince me that it is your joy
at stake, I will make that turn and burn
the next ten thousand generations
of man with words of lost love
and the tragedy of loving that which
is forever on another path.

The Ninety-second Panther Cycle: **the thunder comes down**



Despite the strong images invoked here, you can smell the rain, the coming of a storm to wash away the last vestiges of hope from this relationship.

Here I am revisiting many of the themes she had brought into my life and works, like a desperate man striking a burnt-out match over and over again, knowing that there will be no more spark, but still uncomprehending in his fear of the dark.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

ruby slippers

you left your ruby slippers in New York.
when the light faded, kicked under the bed
as you said dangerous things to a man in love.
shove the psychoanalysis and kiss me before
you click your heels and realize you are
already home. and it isn't Kansas in my heart.

the thunder comes down

measuring a modicum of memories, merged.
urged ardor put on silent display
in words accepted like a gift horse
never saddled. addled lovers making vows
to Gods they don't believe in anyway, playing
at promises and compromises one-sided
and undecided until the games get real
and we can feel the thunder coming down.

truthspeak

whether as lover, or partner.
husband or friend.
I know that, in truthspeak,
our roles cannot end
in one another's spheres.
tears of joy. tears of pain.
tears of glass, which do not stain.

bright, black

bright, black. folded like golden webs
spun as cotton candy on a master's loom.
tomb to the weaver's heart, the griever's art
of remembering the best of what we were.
and will I pass the test of filtered images
when I am gone? will your songs be sweet elegies
of love lost in a maze, a haze of confused dreams
dragged into the street and savagely beaten?

illumination

awesome blossoms bloom in any room
you enter, centering the universe
on the third verse of my lovesong.

and sung with newfound chorus, to implore us
to listen to reason and destiny and the season
of a child of your most beautiful heart.

hope on the road

I am not want to walk alone
but I will, if I must, stirring the dust
when the earth is dry and crying
when the night is cold and gathering
gold to barter at the occasional
tavern of subtle sustenance. but one day
she will arrive, like the warm spring
winds and the summerrain and the smell
of autumn foliage. and I will smile
on this road and laugh sometimes when
inappropriate. but I will not hate
or count my fate as a point of sorrow.
and tomorrow I will render the same
prayers: for peace and love and release
from my quest around some coming turn.
but the journey is a good one and my
fatigue is transitory, like my life.
but not like my hope. my love. and my dreams.

defenseless

dropping my guard, defenses hardened
in years of survivalism made irrelevant
when love arrives at the edge of my vision.
permission granted, dreams decanted to breathe
airs long forgotten. sultry stings, caught on
the ripstop nylon of a heart's windbreaker.
protecting me from the winds of sadness.
madness building to a crescendo. glissando
tears running like frightened children before
the boogeyman. aftermath of a lover's laugh
of sudden realization. no hesitation. no time
to waste to taste the heavenly fruit at apogee.
and we will find a way, bind a way to blind
a playful poet reborn in the morn of no more
mourning. so that I may love forever.

The Ninety-third Panther Cycle: **The Dreams of Glass...**



This was to be the final cycle, but not the final word. Although written a few months after its predecessors, this one flowed rather seamlessly from the emotions of the moment at the previous cycle.

This cycle builds upon a series of conversations the Panther and I had in the intervening months, including several half-hearted attempts at reconciliation, but in the end it was a dead issue. There is no element of that defeatism in this cycle, I had decided to write this as a hopeful, positive capstone, not a tombstone.

“I Dared to Dream of Night-blooming Jasmine” is one of my favourites, as it reflects my romantic code, that you have to hope, to dream, to believe. Yes, I have been savaged more than once in this life by inconsistent or even deceitful lovers, but I get back up, dust myself off, and continue the quest.

And where will it all end? I don’t know, but that’s part of the joy, the mystery.

William F. DeVault – The Compleat Panther Cycles

dreams of glass

when mishandling dreams, there is always a chance
that they will, in their crystalline brittleness, shatter
into a thousand sharp edged memories of what you had.
or would have had.
or could of had.
if.
if you had only closed your hand a moment sooner.
kissed with more conviction. trusted something larger
than yourself for just one moment while daring fate.
daring fate to shine like sunlight focused in a tear
wept like the morning dew. when you knew the truth.
and still had to wake up, every morning, with empty arms.

the paper fulcrum

words. just words. carrying a message that haunts,
that taunts like a demon on the edge of the precipice.
a wrist slit by accident bleeds as deeply as suicide.
I am not afraid of words. but I am afraid of the silence
that comes when words hang like a chrysalis of life
left on the branch until winter comes, proving that
the butterfly inside died a thousand deaths, waiting
for a spring that was always in her hands, alone.

everyday in the garden

I walk everyday to the fields of my soul
and watch for first light, arising before dawn
to scan the tended earth with earnest eyes
that have watered too well the furrows with tears
that are of no use in a greening dream.

I wait. sometimes patiently in my philosophy.
sometimes in pain and sorrow, head hung low.
but I wait. raising my head to distant fields seem lush
with the newlife and oldlife and harvests that are.
gently urging the seeds to sprout and feed me.

pinch

one word
is all it takes
to guarantee, with God as my witness,
that you will never again need
to feel the pinch
of jealousy.

I fear you

there is no one in this world so capable of making me less than what I am.
or more than what I would've been had you not reached down. reached out
and plucked me from the fire I had chained myself in like a fiery Narcissus.
curse me my dreams, deny me my birthright, take from me my heart and cast it.
cast it far.
cast it out of heaven.
cast it down to be trampled by everyone who ever worked for.
fought for.
dreamed of
all that you have been given.
and have not yet taken.
there is no one in this world so capable of making me so happy and content.
or more miserable and anguished, had you not stolen the light. sharing it
with shadows so that I might know a pain I had never before dealt. despair.
and if my lesson to you is to be unconditional love. is yours to me to be
fear?

I dared to dream of night blooming jasmine

You rose early this morning and walked the familiar furrows in the carpet
to stand, as you do, every morning, and watch first light enter her room.
if I am awake, I hear you draw a deep breath, awestruck and marveling
at the feelings that flood you as you see her sleep, like the promised angel
of a distant fantasy, dreaming of a fistful of wildflowers once given to you.
your smile blossomed then like the night blooming jasmine, stealing the wind
to take dreams into the sky to paint other people's destinies.
but none shall find a heaven half as Holy as I have found in your arms.

a poet paces the path

there is a trail in the tall grass.
panthersigns obvious.
and I must follow them.
for, though cursed and crushed.
and ultimately, made tragedy,
this is my path.
my road.
my vision.
my destiny.
and, purified or pitied.
loved or laughed at.
rejected or raised.
it is where I will die.

Epilogue

Well, The Compleat Panther Cycles end here.

And no, I didn't die, although one day I shall, but not from following panthersigns. There have been far tougher tests of my mettle and metal since then, brutal lessons to be learned but only by one willing to wade into the classroom which is the universe and call them down.

For my progress on my quest, I suggest you keep an eye on my web presence, check out one of my readings, and believe in your own life as a legacy you leave for the future generations, to show the value and validity of what you stood for.

There is a little bit of the Poet and the Panther in all of us. It is both what elevates and levels us, that sustains us and gives us something within ourselves to contest with.

I can offer you only the advice of my experience and perceptions, and my epiphanies may be irrelevant to you in detail, but in the grand sweep of human existence, it is unfailingly true.

Believe in love as you believe in God, as a consuming and transforming core to your being, anything less is blasphemy against our natures and is cowardice of the highest (or lowest) order.

Get ready to take your lumps. No one jumps out of an airplane without, regardless of their means of descent, at least a few bumps or bruises. Those who dare the most, win the most, but also have the scars to show for the edification of the armchair warriors. I can not tell you how many times people have taken me aside to tell me their stories of not having followed their hearts, and how much they admire my courage for "putting it out there", then swearing me to secrecy, as they dare not tell the world their truths.

Embrace your own self, but be aware that you can not be right for yourself until you are right for someone else. I spoke those very words to my Panther when she was my Panther and I stand by them. We are pieces of a whole until we join with another, this is the nature of our hearts, our fleshs, our souls.

And, when things go awry, be persistent and ready to roll with the anvils that the less sentimental fates drop on us from on high when it amuses them.

– William F. DeVault